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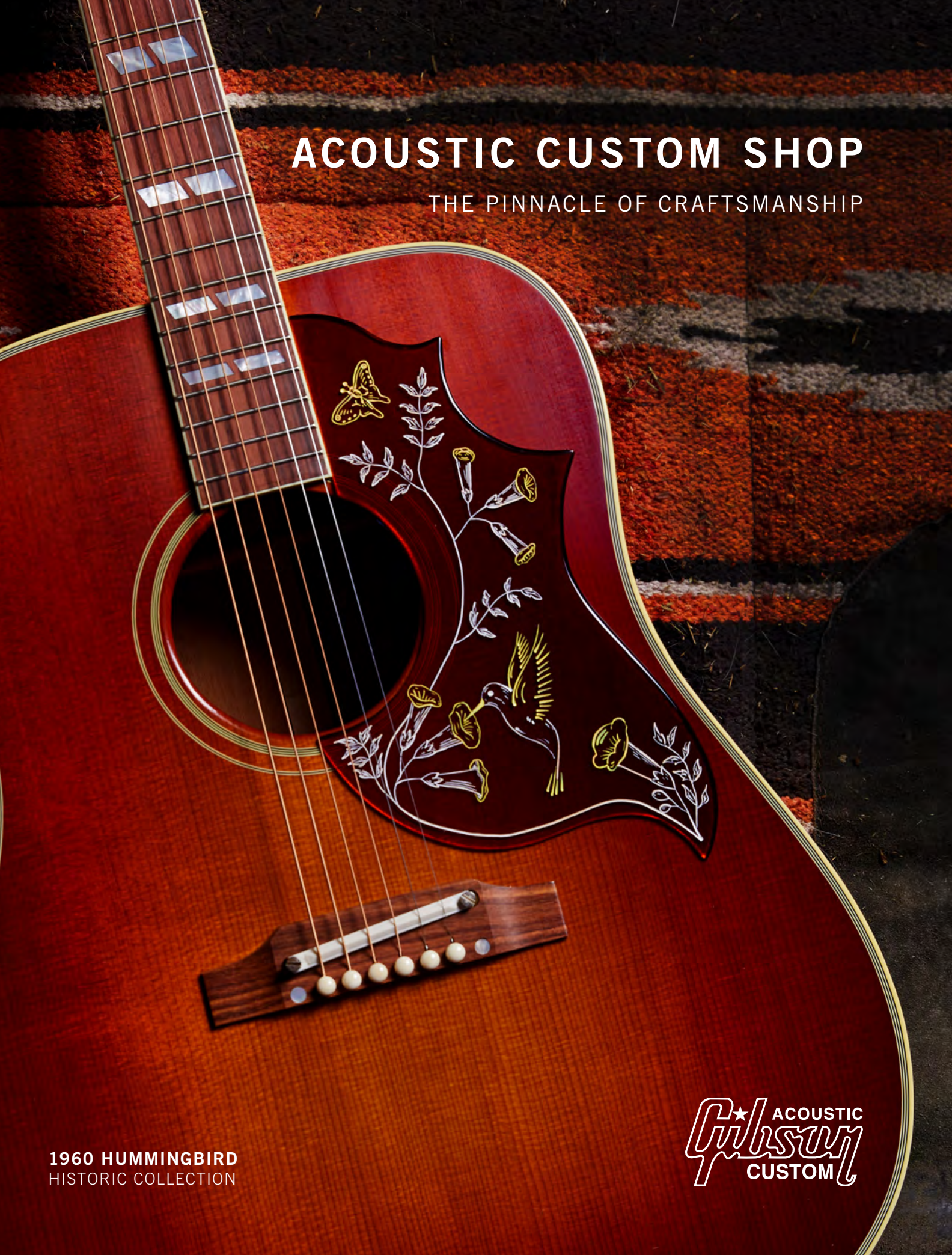
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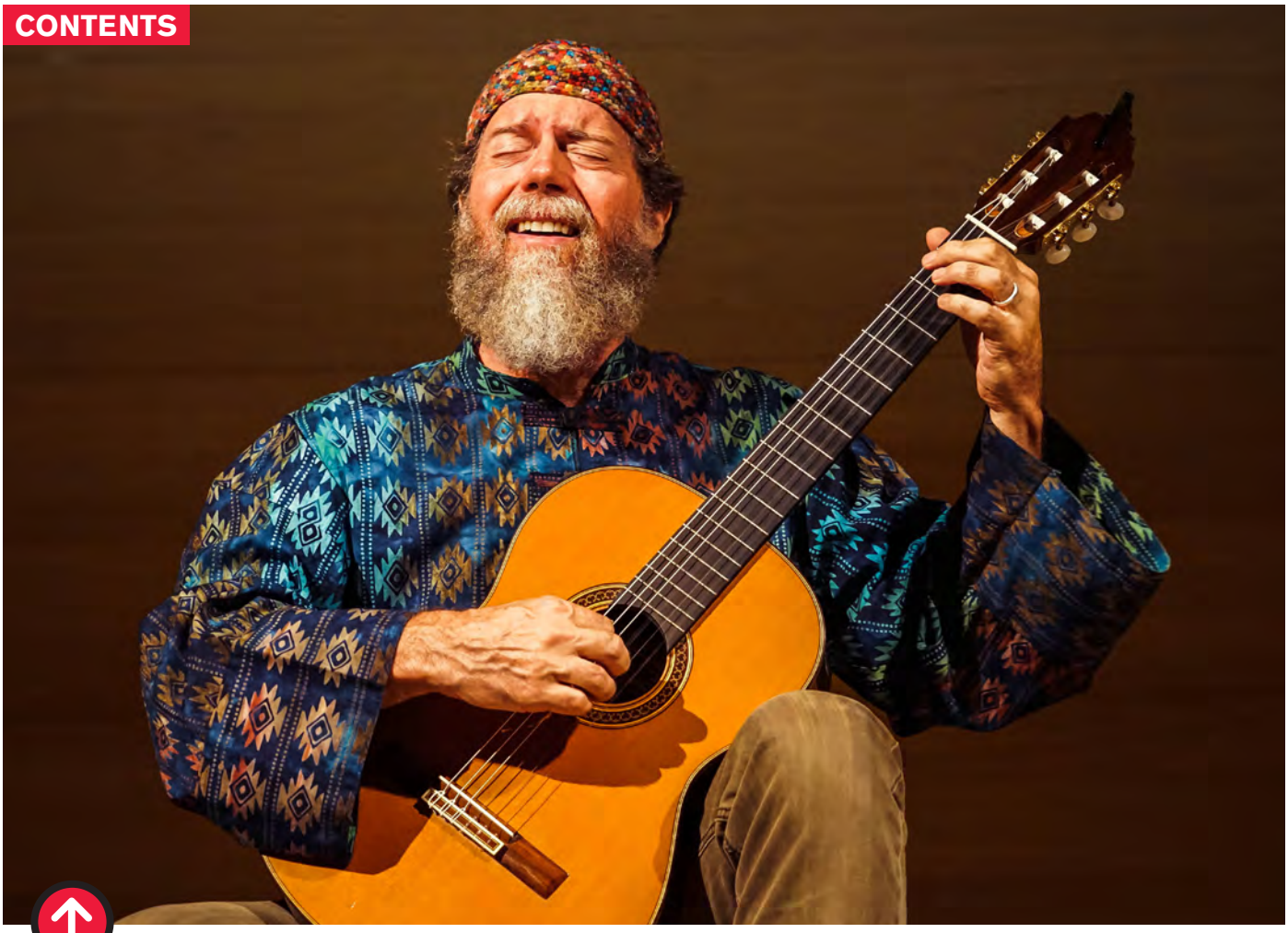
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CONTENTS



CHRISTINE LANG

"I'm always dividing up sounds into their constituent parts, being aware of what's going on around me in a three-dimensional auric sense, and when I'm composing, I'm in that world, immersed in this synesthetic landscape of sound."

–ANDREW YORK

p. 24

Features

18 Slide Show
How a new lap steel sparked Ben Harper's first instrumental album
By Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers

24 Read Some Poetry, Go Stare at a Tree
Catching up with eclectic guitarist and composer Andrew York
By Joseph Skibell

28 An Architectural Vision
Gene Bertoncini and his unique nylon-string approach to jazz
By Kate Koenig

Special Focus
Top Gear: The Best of 2020

32 In the midst of a global pandemic, the guitar market flourishes with high demand for its range of offerings
By Greg Olwell

Miscellany

10 The Front Porch
12 Community
13 Feedback
63 Acoustic Guitar Showcase
74 Luthiers' Row
81 Ad Index

January/February 2021
Volume 31, No. 4, Issue 326

On the Cover
Ben Harper

Photographer
Jacob Boll

CONTENTS

PRS Tonare Parlor SE P20E, p. 68



COURTESY OF PRS GUITARS

SETUP

14 Guitar Talk
Lianne La Havas draws on Brazilian styles in her nylon-string guitar work
By E.E. Bradman

PLAY

38 The Basics
Chord-melody made easy(ish)
By Greg Ruby

42 Weekly Workout
The fundamentals of sweep picking
By Ron Jackson

SONGS

46 Acoustic Classic: Better Way
Ben Harper's optimistic 2006 anthem
By Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers

50 Acoustic Classic: Cam Ye O'er Frae France
A dropped-D arrangement of an irreverent Scottish song
By Danny Carnahan

52 Pickin': Home Sweet Home
Guitar arrangement inspired by Earl Scruggs
By Alan Barnosky

54 Campfire: John Henry
A four-chord tribute to an American folk hero
By Kate Koenig

58 Woodshed
An intro to ragtime guitar through "Davis Street Rag"
By Mary Flower

AG TRADE

60 Makers & Shakers
Canadian nylon-string luthier Joshia de Jonge
By Emile Menasché

64 Here's How
Learn how to restring any guitar with ease
By Martin Keith

66 Ask the Expert
A history of solid headstocks and banjo tuners on guitars
By George Gruhn

68 Review: PRS Tonare Parlor SE P20E
Evoking a bygone era at a budget price
By James Rotondi

70 Review: Gibson 50s LG-2
Reissue with vintage vibe and modern playability
By Nick Millevoi

72 Review: Gold Tone F-6 Mando-Guitar
Unique instrument lets guitarists sound like mandolinists
By Nick Rossi

MIXED MEDIA

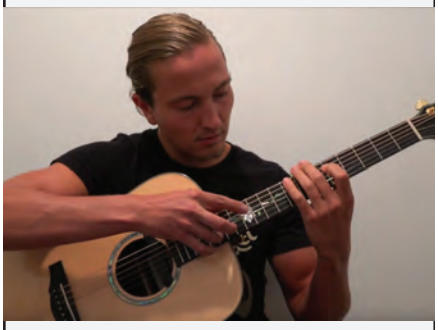
76 Playlist
Pharis & Jason Romero *Bet on Love;* Danny O'Keefe's searing Nez Perce concept album; Duets from Teja Gerken and Doug Young; Toby Hay's *Music for 12-String Guitar;* James Elkington's restless *Ever-Roving Eye;* Bobby Rush goes back to basics; Newman & Oltman play Leo Brouwer; sounds of the South on *Hanging Tree Guitars;* down in Louisiana with Cary Morin; *Slide* from Al Petteway

82 Great Acoustics
Preston Thompson Masterpiece #2 Koi Pond
By Greg Olwell


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Brazilian nylon-string virtuoso Badi Assad plays and discusses her song "Zoar" in this exclusive video from *AG*'s reimagined Sessions series. (acousticguitar.com/sessions)



GIBSON 50s LG-2
Reissue pairs vintage vibe with modern playability. (p. 70)



A GATEWAY TO RAGTIME
"Davis Street Rag" is a simple intro to ragtime guitar. (p. 58)



"CAM YE O'ER FRAE FRANCE"
Danny Carnahan interprets a Scottish classic. (p. 50)

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THE FRONT PORCH

Rudy Pensa of Rudy's Music



STEPHANIE PENSA

Few places are as exciting for the archtop enthusiast as the New York City location of Rudy's Music, in Soho, steps away from where the legendary luthier John D'Angelico had a workshop from the 1930s until his death in 1964. On display are guitars by D'Angelico, his protégé John D'Aquisto, John Monteleone, and others, giving the general public the rare chance to see a collection of these magnificent instruments all in one place.

So, it's understandable that when this month's cover subject, Ben Harper, visited Rudy's ten years ago he had a revelation. Harper almost left Rudy's with a Monteleone archtop whose sound he was stunned by, but knew that it just wouldn't work to convert the instrument to a lap steel for his preferred approach. Instead, Harper went for a dream commission. After years of back and forth with the luthier, he received a Monteleone built for lap slide, the only example of its type.

Harper's Monteleone takes the center stage on the singer-songwriter's brilliant new instrumental suite, *Winter Is for Lovers*, on which the guitar is heard unaccompanied and in luxurious detail. Editor at Large Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers caught up with Harper, as well as Monteleone, to chat all about the creation of both the instrument and the album. Meanwhile, in this issue's Acoustic Classic department, Rodgers revisits Harper's 2006 hit "Better Way," providing both an easy way to strum through this three-chord song, and a note-for-note transcription of the Weissenborn guitar solo heard on the original studio recording. Harper himself was kind enough to prepare a video tutorial for the solo; be sure to check it out at AcousticGuitar.com.

Elsewhere in the issue are profiles of three musicians with decidedly different approaches to the nylon-string, showing the breadth and range of the instrument and its repertoire: Lianne La Havas, an R&B singer-songwriter who borrows from the bossa nova tradition; Andrew York, a prominent modern guitarist and composer; and Gene Bertoncini, one of the undersung jazz greats, with a deep approach.

It's become a recent tradition to feature an annual overview of the previous year's new gear in *AG*, and Editor at Large Greg Olwell writes about some of the best guitars, amps, and accessories we came across. It was a strange year for everyone, and last spring, many instrument makers were shuttered and feeling great uncertainty. But as the range of offerings in Olwell's feature hint at, 2020 ended up being a very strong year for instrument companies—no doubt in large part due to so many of us being sheltered at home and spending more time with the guitar, or perhaps taking it up for the first time. I'd like to think that this is very good news for all of us.

I hope that you will enjoy reading—and playing through—the issue and that this new year will bring you many musical rewards and discoveries.

—Adam Perlmutter
Adam.Perlmutter@Stringletter.com


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DOIN' WORK

I want to thank you and your columnist Ron Jackson for the excellent "Pass It On" Weekly Workout in the September/October issue exploring Joe Pass' style of comping with a walking bass line. As I looked over the lesson at first, I never expected to even try the Week 4 exercise of adding the syncopated rhythm to the walking bass. But here I am four weeks later doing this!

Jackson begins by explaining the Freddie Green style of chord comping, which was a useful lesson in itself. Then getting used to 4/4 in the bass, then the very cool walking pattern. By taking it step by step as suggested, I indeed found myself adding the syncopated Charleston rhythm to the walking bass and new chord shapes.

I always learn useful things from your lessons, usually in my normal styles; I'm often less than successful at learning jazz guitar. Ron Jackson patiently opened a door for me, just what a great teacher does. Learning new skills and even a new style on guitar is always fun, both musically and mentally. This was a great lesson.

—Russell Ruderman, Keaau, HI

WHEN YOU WISH UPON A GUITAR

In the November/December issue, we asked readers to tell us about a guitar type they'd like to add to their collection.

Fender American Acoustasonic Telecaster



Over my six decades of playing guitar, I've managed to acquire a small, modest collection of guitars that more than suit my musical tastes and playing ability. I bought an acoustic 12-string in high school in the '60s (which I still own), upgraded with a Takamine "lawsuit" six-string in the '80s, and eventually purchased a Telecaster and Stratocaster while playing in classic rock bands in the '90s and 2000s. My wife gifted me a Guild True American in 1999 and two years ago I was able to build my own OM model acoustic through the guidance of a luthier friend in Arizona. Currently, I'm completely fascinated with Fender's American Acoustasonic Telecaster. If the variation of sounds (both acoustic and electric) that I've heard on the many video reviews are accurate and it plays as smoothly and comfortably as my electric Tele, then I'd love to have one. I like the size and feel of the Tele and, soundwise, I know it would fit in nicely with the acoustic Americana/roots group that I play in today.

—Randy Cummings, Denton, TX

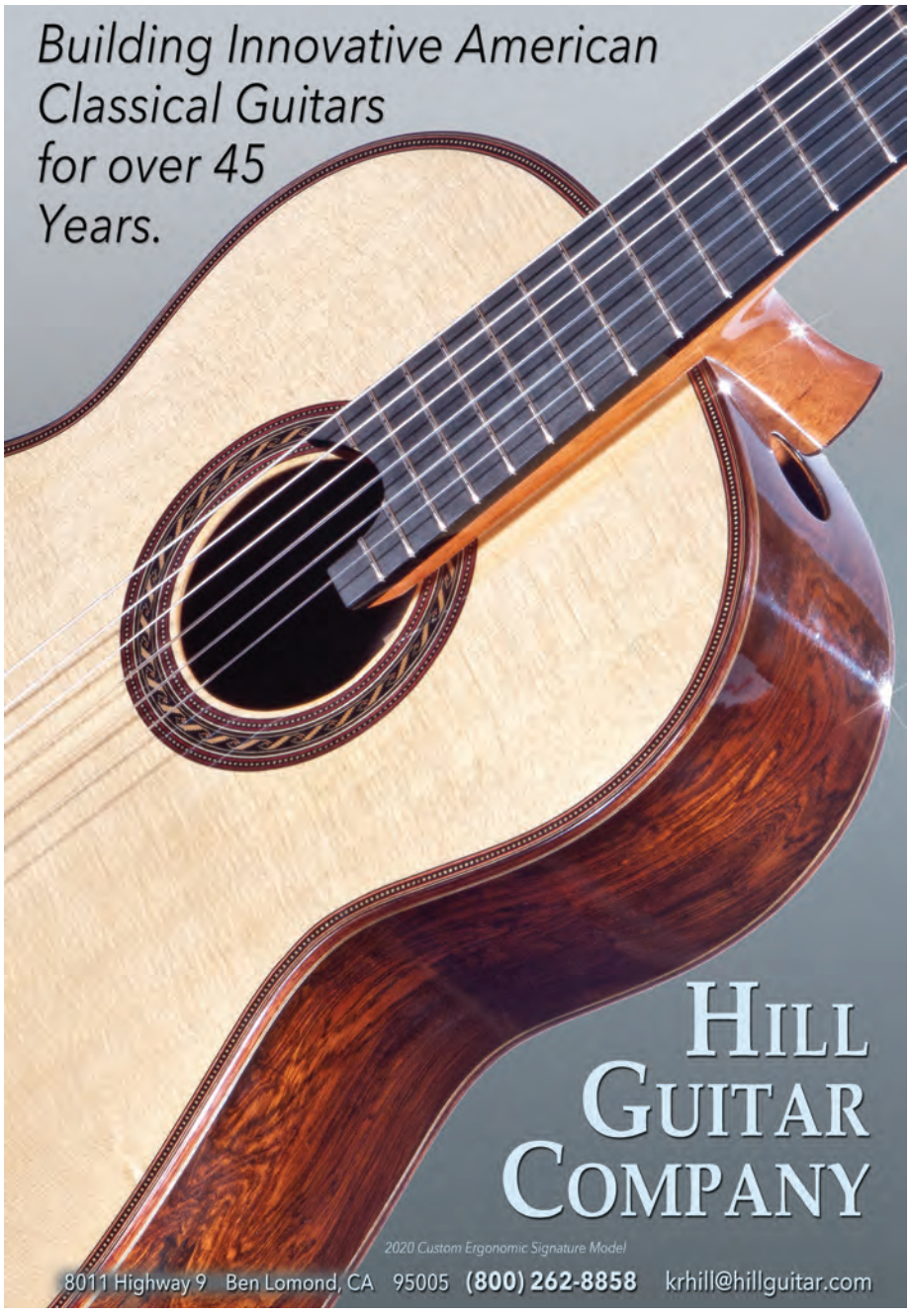
I own a 1955 Martin 00-18, which I have played since I was eight. Now I'm 68 and just a few years ago started performing. I don't want to alter the Martin, and I need a guitar I can plug in. I've heard the Mini Maton in person and now it's on my wish list!

—Susan Garriques, via email

CORRECTION

In the November/December issue, on page 76, the performance notes to "Deck the Halls" mention wrapping the thumb around the neck to fret the note F on string 1. That should be the F on string 6.

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Lianne La Havas



JEAN-MARC BELLENGER

GUITAR TALK

Brazilian Flavors

English singer-songwriter Lianne La Havas draws from bossa nova and samba in her nylon-string guitar work

BY E.E. BRADMAN

Lianne La Havas' third album, a self-titled song cycle that chronicles the full arc of an intense relationship, is dreamy for several reasons: its modern/vintage R&B production, bittersweet lyrics, inspirations that range from Lauryn Hill to Emily Remler to Radiohead, and of course, La Havas' signature combination of passionate vocals and jazzy chord choices. While the 31-year-old British chanteuse may be most closely associated with her 1964 Harmony Alden H45 Stratotone, she has also pulled out Córdoba and Aria acoustics in the studio and onstage. La Havas' recent performance for the "Home" edition of NPR's Tiny Desk series is a great introduction to her approach, an amalgam of rhythmic fingerpicking she first learned from her father; Brazilian flavor inherited from many hours of listening to artists like Milton Nascimento; and jazz inflections she picked up from friends, bandmates, lovers, and YouTube.

"The acoustic, I do love it," La Havas says from London. "Performing these new songs, I realized they can be played on electric or acoustic, but doing this album, it was nice not to feel totally tethered to just the electric. I started off like that and became more known with an electric guitar, but honestly, I think it just depends on the song and how it feels."

Watching your most recent NPR Tiny Desk video made me wonder why you don't play acoustic more.

I did Tiny Desk entirely on acoustic simply because it was the beginning of lockdown and I didn't have anything set up in my house. But I'm glad I did, because there's something very intimate about nylon-string guitar—it's just you sharing a song, like you're around the fire or something. I quite like that vibe.

What made you choose acoustic for the songs "Seven Times" and "Sour Flower" on the album?

I wanted those songs to be acoustic because I'm so influenced by bossa nova and samba guitar, which sounds much more authentic when played on the nylon-string. There's something quite percussive about acoustic, as well, that I don't think you can get from electric. With a nylon, you can really go for it, and it's very dynamic.

You picked up guitar at 18, and your first album came out a few years later. Did you study with a teacher?

I wished always for proper guitar lessons, but I couldn't afford them. I was really lucky that

my dad knew how to play stuff. He was very excited when I wanted to learn, so he took it upon himself to show me whatever he knew. When I got to school, there were guitar lessons available, but I was more of a singer. My headmistress paid for my vocal coaching, which was very kind of her. I was a part of two choirs in my school, and I was able to study music, as well.

So what got you interested in guitar?
I was the backing vocalist in a band with some girls my age or thereabouts, and they were writing their own songs, singing, and playing guitar. That's when I decided I wanted to learn. My dad taught me the basics of fingerpicking, and from there, I just got more interested in other rhythms. I was hungry to find other ones.

What happened next?
I found loads of guitar videos—I discovered Tommy Emmanuel, and Martin Taylor, and Emily Remler, all from YouTube. By day, I would be doing backing vocals in a band and going to college, and by night, I would go online and practice quietly, because I was staying in my auntie's house. I was learning different rhythms, and then I started creating my own based on the fingerpicking I had learned. My friends would show me chords, so I learned the minor ninth, which I always use, because it's nice and rich but still sad. That was one of the first ones that I learned, so now I find it difficult to play open chords, because I'm so used to playing rich jazz chords, which make it all into all of my songs. I've kind of gone backwards: Now I'm learning all my scales and teaching myself other techniques that I probably should have learned first.

You mentioned the minor ninth. What other chords caught your ear?
The major ninth and the sixth. I recently learned the 6/9, which is super rich and has so many possibilities. I like using all six strings for that one, and it's pretty versatile. I'm trying to work out how to use the 6/9 in context: where it can replace something, maybe to make it richer; how to travel to it and from it; what simple chords go with it.

'There's something very intimate about nylon-string guitar—it's just you sharing a song, like you're around the fire or something.'

I saw a quote where you were taken aback by some people's surprise that you can actually play. I consider you in the same lineage of people like Joan Armatrading, H.E.R., Valerie June…
I love those all artists so much! I'd be interested to know if any of them went to school or had any formal training, because I always thought I couldn't call myself a professional unless I'd had formal training. I know it's silly, but I just feel like I want to earn that status. I've got loads of friends who I'm constantly in awe of, who are really accomplished jazz players, and I'm just like, "What the hell is that chord? Please tell me what you're doing!"

When you were in school, did you play piano?
My dad got me a keyboard for my seventh birthday, and that was when I started. It was before I was singing, actually. I took to it pretty quick; there were programmed songs in the keyboard, so I'd work out the melody to those and play them with my right hand.

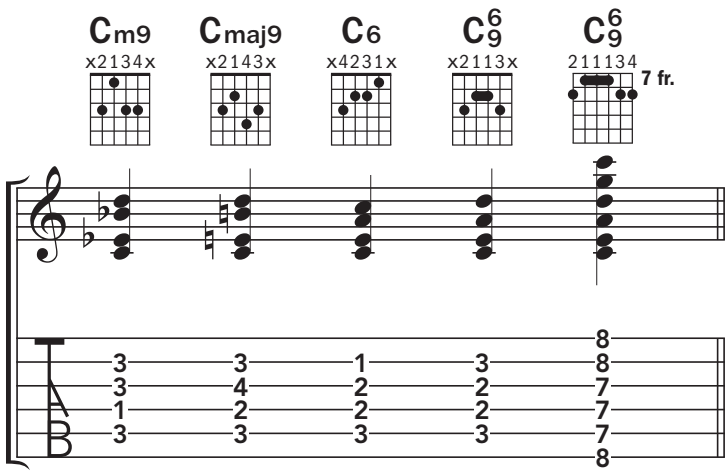
But you didn't take lessons.
I would have loved piano lessons, but that was expensive. Also, it's not really what I wanted to play. I knew my scales and stuff, but I feel like piano lessons signified not being free on the instrument: You have to do grades, learn classical pieces, and follow the curriculum. I found it a little bit less exciting, so I used to just do my own thing.

Do you feel like you can be more yourself on guitar?
Absolutely. Piano was nice, but I couldn't really do it how I wanted to do it, no matter how much I practiced. It never felt amazing the way guitar does. I think it's because there's something percussive about the guitar, and there's a certain synchronization that happens when you're playing one thing with your hands and singing something else with your voice. It just feels really complete when I play guitar, like I'm singing on top of it, instead of going through it, you know?

COLORFUL CHORDS

Lianne La Havas has a penchant for evocative harmonies; shown here are a handful of chords that have captured her imagination. The first shape, Cm9, is a rich stand-in for a C minor triad, and any of the other chords can be used in place of a C major. While the first C6/9 chord here occupies an interior string set, La Havas prefers to play it on all six strings, as shown in the last frame.

—Adam Perlmutter



Some people find it difficult to balance singing and playing, especially with new material.
I'll be honest with you—this new album is really hard to play and sing. I did most of it on guitar first and then sang after. It wasn't until January, in rehearsals, that I was playing and singing some of these songs for the first time. I'm still getting to grips with the new material, but it's going to be very satisfying when I get it.

Which songs do you find most challenging?
"Seven Times" is one of the harder ones. I haven't done my ultimate version of it yet, but I'll get there. I do like singing it, though, and I'm close. I have to sing and play "Sour Flower" in five, and then "Can't Fight" is probably the hardest, because it was looped—I'm trying to play the loop exactly the same but also have a dynamic vocal. So yeah, I'm learning how to get this album under the fingers and in the pocket.

What's your songwriting process? I imagine that songs come to you in many different ways.
Sometimes, I believe that ideas will come back if they're really important; if they're meant to stick around in your memory, they will. But that also might be BS [*laughs*]. That might just be me being lazy because I'm so tired. Lately, if I hear an idea in my head, I don't want to ignore it.

Do you set aside time for the muse to visit?
Usually, I hear something in my head right before I'm about to go to bed. That's what happened with "Paper Thin," for example. I heard it just before I was about to go to sleep, but I thought, let me just get the guitar. I could hear the chords and everything, even the rhythm and the first words and the melody. It remained without any other words or structure until I was able to jam it with some friends on the bass and drums, and then it became what you now hear on the album. I have an idea, I jam it, and then I write the melody and stuff over that.

How about writing with other musicians?
On this album, I wrote a lot with my friend Sam Crowe, who plays piano. He wrote "Green Papaya" and "Sour Flower" with me. We would get in a room and play chords until something stuck out to us that we liked. We were just going with the feeling of how the chords sounded, and then we'd find a rhythm. With "Sour Flower," I remember, we were liking C that day. We tried that chord in a couple of rhythms, but for some reason, 5/8 stuck out to us, so we just said, "Okay, we're going to do C chord in 5," and we felt it out—like, what is the next logical chord? What does it feel good to go to? And that is basically how I live my life [*laughs*]. "What feels good? Let's do that."


COURTESY OF LIANNE LA HAVAS

By the way, Sam is that guy who knows all the chords. He's an incredible pianist. He played a chord voicing on the piano, and I asked him to play each note in order so I could work out the equivalent on the guitar.

What a cool way to learn voicings.
I know! If you just play a chord voicing like a pianist, it's a whole different vibe on guitar. My fingers ended up in this mental shape, and I still don't know what that chord is called, but I used it in a few other songs as soon as I learned it.

If I was going to put together a playlist of your favorite acoustic guitar moments, who would be on it?
Jessica Pratt's "Bushel Hyde" is gorgeous, absolutely stunning. A Milton Nascimento song—I reckon "Cravo e Canela," from *Clube da Esquina*. "A Nível De…" by João Bosco, which has the most beautiful guitar part in the intro. And another Jobim song, like the João Gilberto version of "Girl from Ipanema." So, there you go—mostly Brazilian stuff.

When you were growing up, did you hear powerful Black performers like Joan Armatrading and Tracy Chapman?
I didn't hear Joan till I was a bit older, but Tracy Chapman was extremely famous when I was growing up, so yeah, I'm a huge fan. Now I'm a really big Joan Armatrading fan, too. I love her music, I love her soul—I listened to a lot of her, actually, when I was making this album.

What acoustic guitars are you playing these days?
The only ones I have are nylon-strings. I got rid of all my steel-string acoustic guitars because I just haven't found one that feels nice and sounds nice to me, but I've got two nylons that I love. I have a Córdoba 12 Natural and an Aria. The Córdoba one I spent a bit of money on—it's more professional, I use it live, and it's got a pickup; the Aria I just found in a thrift shop in L.A., and it's actually a really legit, beautiful-sounding nylon-string.

After watching your Tiny Desk performance, I imagined how great a Lianne La Havas acoustic album would be. Will that ever happen?
Watch this space. You might be satisfied in your request. But you didn't hear it from me! AG





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SLIDE SHO

How a new lap steel guitar sparked Ben Harper's first instrumental album

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS



PHOTO BY MATHIEU BITTON



In 2010, during a visit to New York City, Ben Harper stopped into the guitar mecca Rudy's Music to check out instruments. He was sampling a series of top-of-the-line archtops when a guitar stopped him in his tracks: an instrument by renowned luthier John Monteleone. Though Harper is best known as a lap steel player who brought vintage Weissenborns into the limelight of contemporary roots-rock, he heard in that archtop a tone quality that he'd been seeking for years, and he wondered whether Monteleone would consider building a guitar for lap slide.

So began a years-long dialogue between Harper and Monteleone that led eventually to the creation of the Monteleone Radio City Special Deluxe acoustic lap steel—Monteleone's first-ever guitar designed for lap-style playing (see "A New Kind of Lap Steel," below). This one-of-a-kind guitar has become one of Harper's core instruments, and a new album provides its ultimate showcase. *Winter Is for Lovers,* released in October, is a mesmerizing 30-minute journey on the Monteleone lap steel, with no singing and no other instruments. Harper conceived the music as a single piece with 15 movements, each named for a place, including Istanbul, Inland Empire (Harper's home turf in Southern California), London, Toronto, and Islip—the Long Island town where Monteleone has his shop.

Though Harper has never been a flashy instrumentalist, his lush guitar work has been at the center of his music since his 1994 debut album, *Welcome to the Cruel World*. He literally grew up in his grandparents' music store, the Folk Music Center in Claremont, California, a hub for folk and ethnic music that introduced him to instrumental masters such as David Lindley, Taj Mahal, and Chris Darrow, who became his mentors. Harper's prominence as a guitarist is evident in signature models created by Martin (a limited edition 0000 flattop), Asher (electric lap steel), and Dunlop (slide bar).



Winter Is for Lovers follows a series of projects that reconnect Harper with his roots: the Grammy-winning *Get Up!* with bluesman Charlie Musselwhite and its follow-up, *No Mercy in This Land;* a folky collaboration with his mother, Ellen Harper, on *Childhood Home*; Mavis Staples' *We Get By,* which he produced; and, most recently, a banjo/guitar duet with Rhiannon Giddens on Nick Drake's "Black Eyed Dog."

Harper, now 50, loves talking guitars, and when I connected with him this fall, he spoke effusively about his new instrument and his lifelong quest for the ultimate tone. As this conversation explores, *Winter Is for Lovers* both spotlights Harper's original love of lap slide and carries him into new territory.

When you first played a Monteleone guitar, what did you hear that was different from your other instruments?

I stumbled into the SoHo Rudy's and was overwhelmed—it's not just anywhere in the world you can play guitars like that, one after another. I'm not a big jazz guitarist, but I've always chosen flattops that have a little archtop sound to them, and I've always chosen archtops that have a little flattop resonance to them. I'd dreamed of being able to combine those [in one guitar] but had never been able to do it.

So there I was at Rudy's, sitting there playing the D'Angelicos, D'Aquistos, the top level of archtops. As I sat there, Rudy [Pensa] came over and said, "Hey, man, try this." I was

A NEW KIND OF LAP STEEL

When Ben Harper first contacted John Monteleone about building an acoustic lap steel, in 2010, the soft-spoken luthier didn't immediately agree—he wanted to make sure first that he could create an instrument unlike anything already available. But Monteleone was intrigued, especially when he recalled seeing local players try alternate tunings and slide on small-body archtops like the Gibson L-5. "What I noticed in those early days, long before I met Ben, was that the archtop guitar has possibilities beyond what is commonly assumed," says Monteleone. "To bring it into a more sensitive fingerstyle guitar always interested me."

Monteleone considered building a hollow-neck instrument but concluded that was impractical—and he didn't want to re-create a Weissenborn. Ultimately, he decided to adapt his 16-inch archtop with a square neck. The body and neck of Harper's guitar are red maple, and the top is Adirondack spruce with a pair of elliptical duet-style soundholes. For the tuners, tailpiece, and other details, Harper picked Monteleone's Art Deco–inspired Radio City design.

Monteleone builds most of his guitars with side sound ports, which offer a unique opportunity on a lap-style instrument. "On his guitar I thought, well, the soundholes are going to be facing him directly anyway," says Monteleone, "so let's put a port on the treble side, toward the audience."

mid-chord, and I just swapped them out. Didn't take a close look. But what I heard from the very first note was a sound that I had been reaching for in one instrument and had not heard before. I had to take a second look: What is this? I could have sworn he handed me a flattop, but it was an archtop guitar, and I was stunned.

The more I played it, the more I was stunned. I knew of John Monteleone by reputation, and at that point I knew I had to find him.

A part of me was so taken aback by the sound, I was an inch away from walking out of that store with that archtop and turning it into a lap steel—raising the nut and adjusting it all. But I couldn't do that to the instrument.

How would you compare the Monteleone's sound to what you get from a Weissenborn?

Three main points: the sustain, the overtones, the projection. Weissenborns are incredible instruments, and they have carried me a long, long way. I will still be playing them live in every show. But John has a very rare understanding of what makes instruments not only sound great but thrive in a particular player's hands.

John's genius is not lore; it's grounded and based in reality. I said to myself, if you were alive back in the day and had the means to obtain a Stradivarius from Stradivari, would you have done it? I went for it, and it was everything I had dreamed of sonically, and more. And that doesn't take away from the Weissenborn and its place in the choir.

On *Winter Is for Lovers*, what were you looking to explore or accomplish that you hadn't done before?

I've been planning on doing an instrumental record for quite some time, and the Monteleone was a major arrival that ushered in the completion of the project.

It started out as an exploration of steel guitar. I have a very in-depth collection of lap steel guitars, and I had planned on using them all, or at least my A team. I was going to weave electric and acoustic tones in and out. But once the Monteleone got behind the mic, the producer/engineer, Sheldon Gomberg, just kept saying, "You know, let's stay with that." He and I agreed that the tone seemed fresh and original, and no other instrument could beat it. So we said, let's just stay in this same lane. *Winter Is for Lovers* is written as one piece of music; let's define that in the way that the old classical guitarists would have, on a single guitar.

A few years ago, you talked about doing trio and orchestral arrangements for this project. Did you just decide the guitar felt complete on its own?

I wish I was that concise and precise. In full disclosure, I went into Capitol Studios and orchestrated this record to the moon. It was fully produced with percussion, symphony, piano. I put a great deal of time into that particular version of this record before it dawned on me that its strongest step forward and its purest voice was going to be just the guitar. I stripped it all back.

The challenging part was actually coming to that realization after it was done, as you can imagine. The silver lining was the experience, because it was wonderful working it up as a symphonic piece—to show myself that you can build a symphonic orchestration around a lap steel. And it's even more gratifying that we have [orchestral versions of] "Joshua Tree" and "Inland Empire" as B sides. I'm very excited about those, in particular because the maestro, the great Robert Glasper, is on keyboards, as well as Christopher Bleth on duduk, Mike Valerio from the L.A. Philharmonic on upright bass, and Jimmy Paxon—drummer for myself and Charlie Musselwhite, the [Dixie] Chicks, Stevie Nicks—on percussion.

People ask, why did you wait till now to make this record? If I were any younger, I wouldn't have been able to step back and remove that production. I would have been too tied to it. But I am at a place in my life where I have the presence of mind and clarity to know that I had gone too far.

I was surprised to learn that you recorded the album in 2019, because this really sounds like a quarantine project. The music is so intimate and meditative, and with place names in the titles, the album is like a



COURTESY OF JOHN MONTELEONE

Harper at Monteleone's shop on the day he picked up his new guitar.

The side port has a sliding panel made of stainless spring steel, and, Harper says, "That little bit of steel plate amongst the carved wood is like having a little reverb chamber in the body cavity."

Monteleone knew Harper was planning to use the guitar acoustically as well as plugged in, and he had Kent Armstrong build a custom floating magnetic pickup. "One aspect of the pickup I wanted to do was build the volume and tone controls into the tailpiece, so they wouldn't interfere with the soundboard," says Monteleone. "That worked out really well."

The new lap steel underwent one significant modification after its delivery in 2017. To make the guitar sit more level across Harper's lap, Monteleone added what he calls a top hat: a carved wooden support that's permanently attached under the neck and rests on the left leg.

As for the sonic result of this collaboration, *Winter Is for Lovers* captures the guitar in fine-grain detail, recorded with two microphones and a touch of pickup signal. Harper sets up the guitar with D'Addario light-gauge Flat Tops and uses a Scheerhorn stainless steel bar in the studio. He played the entire album with bare fingers except for one piece ("London") with a pick.

For Monteleone, hearing the music Harper has already created on the guitar is the greatest reward. "I had no idea that he was going to respond to the guitar so quickly and become inspired enough to produce an album such as this new one," says Monteleone. "What an honor." *—JPR*

travelogue in a time when we can't travel.
Wild. I have debates with very close friends about how context redefines content, but boy, it has never been proven so clearly as now. You're absolutely right.

I actually had a friend call and inform me that, because she missed traveling so much, she actually felt like she was traveling by way of this record. And I thought exactly what you're saying. I was moved that music without lyrics could take you on a sonic journey in that way.

In the age of the shuffle, it is unusual to have an album that follows a sort of storyline for the entire 15 tracks.
I'm so excited to hear you say that in an era where the album is on the ropes, so to speak, as far as how people receive music. To me this feels like an album that can only be an album. Some albums, even that I've made, I've looked back on them and said, I could have done an EP or I could have just done a few songs at a time. But this one I feel confident is an album from first note to last.

In some ways, this music brings to mind steel-string soloists like John Fahey or Robbie Basho. Did you have any particular artists in mind as models?
Connected to my family's music store was a coffeehouse called the Golden Ring, a renowned venue in the late '50s, early '60s, for traveling folk musicians. John Fahey was a mainstay there. I never met John nor heard him live, but my family has first-person contact with him and many stories. John Fahey gave birth to Leo Kottke, made way for Michael Hedges. . . . You know, Michael Hedges' record *Tap Root* was a revelation for me at a young age.

So yeah, I've long been an appreciator of that sound and that direction a guitar could go in, and I also had a healthy dose of David Lindley, Ry Cooder, Chris Darrow, who were all from the surrounding area and circled my family's music store. And Taj Mahal—I've known Taj since birth basically. Being a Black youth and seeing a Black man play an acoustic instrumental was incredibly potent. Taj was the first person I saw mesmerize people with an instrumental.

To my ear, the music on *Winter Is for Lovers* is not very blues-based. It sounds more like parlor music.
One hundred percent. I've never been able to play like anyone else. I love Andrés Segovia, Narciso Yepes—I could never do what they do. All the people I mentioned, John Fahey, Leo Kottke—I could never do that. But I'm a lap steel player. I grew up with the sound of the lap steel as my childhood lullaby. I feel fortunate to have lived long enough for that stuff to find its way into my own unorthodox style and method on the lap steel guitar.

I've always heard this cross-section of classical and flamenco and blues and then something else, maybe something Celtic, far off in the distance. I mean, I've been hearing this record in my soul for a long time. It just took me till now to reach that sound.

As far as I can tell, all the pieces on the album are in the key of D, and played in open-D tuning or maybe variants of open D. Is that right?
It's D A D F♯ A D; regular open D, the whole piece. It's funny you would say that because, I mean, in classical music, it's OK to have a 30-minute Bach Cello Suite No. 1 in G major. It's OK if you have a 20-minute classical composition that's in one key. So why wouldn't it be OK for a lap steel symphony? That was part of my mindset: that violinists and cellists can't have all the fun when it comes to longer symphonic compositions.

But don't think it didn't cross my mind numerous times: Am I allowed to do this? Is this OK? Do I need to tune up to E or down to C or use a different guitar? You ask yourself all these questions but, at the end of the day, you have to choose what's going to bring out the best in the music. And if you're not being brave, you're not pioneering your art form. Along the way, of course you're going to take the hits, you're going to fall flat, you're going to be embarrassed. But if we're not going to take chances in this life, when are we going to get to do it?

The "top hat" support that Monteleone installed after the guitar was built.



COURTESY OF JOHN MONTELEONE

Videos for the new album show you at the Folk Music Center, performing in front of a wall of stringed instruments from around the world. What is your connection with the store these days?
The store has been open for 62 years, and my oldest son, who is 23, is just now starting to work there. He is the fifth generation to work in the store full time: my great-grandparents, my grandparents, my mom, me, and now my son. So that's incredibly rewarding, because I would like to keep it open.

Another important component of the store to me is providing instruments for beginners that play in a friendly way, whether it's violin, banjo, recorder, or guitar, so that they have the best chance of maintaining their relationship with music. It's hard enough to play an instrument without the action being through the roof, without it being set up properly. So we want to maintain that connection with people who are just starting out, as well as keeping a stable collection of vintage instruments. That gets harder and harder to do with the online vintage sales that happen now, but we maintain.

And the third [aspect] is commitment to community and providing an environment where musicians at all levels can thrive. A lot of that ties into our open mic night, on the last Sunday of every month. I think it's the best open mic night in Southern California, if not California, period. Everybody gets two songs and no more than 15 minutes, and no matter how long the line is, everybody ends up getting their time and getting that exposure. And I mean, we've had everybody on that stage before they were recognized, from myself to Phoebe Bridgers to the Black Pumas. It's *game on* there. AG

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IE POETRY, AT A TREE

Catching up with the eclectic guitarist and composer Andrew York

BY JOSEPH SKIBELL

CHRISTINE LANG

When I spoke to Andrew York last spring, right before half of the world's population began sheltering in place, he was putting the final touches on his new online video subscription service, Andrew's Den.

"We have maybe 30 videos edited," he told me, "and another 20 in the can."

Since then, in weekly video postings, the virtuoso guitarist and composer has been discussing the technical issues involved in playing his own pieces, "the inner lines, how to be aware of some of the compositional form, and how to bring it out," as well as more general subjects pertaining to music and guitar.

"I'm doing a series on improvisation, on ear-training, on identifying intervals," York tells me. "I'll do composition, ultimately, and fingerboard knowledge, of course. Just as wide an array of subjects that I can offer with my multistylistic background and my abilities of improvisation and composition, too."

The short weekly films in the Andrew's Den series are produced and edited by York's wife, Annette, who has also been serving for the last couple of years as his manager. Filmed with his guitar on the blue sofa in his music room in Redlands, California, York is a warm and soulful teacher.

In fact, it's hard to imagine a more knowledgeable and gifted guide.

A PROLIFIC CAREER

It has been over 30 years since York, a classical composer and instrumentalist trained in jazz, launched his career with the double whammy of having John Williams, perhaps then the most famous classical guitarist in the world, record his piece "Sunburst," while his own steel-string performance of "Andecy" was included on the wildly popular 1988 *Windham Hill Guitar Sampler*.

Commissions from Christopher Parkening soon followed, and as York's solo career continued with performances and recordings of his own, in 1990 he became a member of the fabled Los Angeles Guitar Quartet as well, performing, composing, and arranging on ten of the group's albums, including the 2005 Grammy Award-winning *Guitar Heroes,* before departing from the group on amicable terms in 2006.

At 62, York remains as prolific as ever. His work has been embraced by a new generation of classical players, including Jason Vieaux and Sharon Isbin, while the video of him performing his own composition "Home" on an 1888 Torres guitar for Guitar Salon International has been viewed over three million times on YouTube.

"So, I'm wondering," I say, "how, into four decades, you've been able to keep moving forward as an artist."



CHRISTINE LANG

"Well, the short answer is that I guess it depends on the reasons you have for doing it. Probably my earliest memory with sound is being in a stroller, when I was a baby, and hearing the 'bong' of the escalator. Back in those days," he says, "if you were in a department store, and they had an escalator, they always had a bell. And I remember this incredible fascination I had with the quality of the sound: the timbre, the envelope. I listened to it decay. I might have been one year old, you know, but it was this fascinating sound.

"And over the years, I realized, this is why I do what I do," he continues. "I'm always dividing up sounds into their constituent parts, being aware of what's going on around me in a three-dimensional auric sense, and when I'm composing, I'm in that world, immersed in this synesthetic landscape of sound. So, that's the first thing, and the second is my father playing guitar and my family being musical, and that was always there. And as soon as I could play guitar, even as a young boy, I imagined myself onstage."

"And what's been consistent and what has changed over those years, for you, in terms of working as a composer?"

"That's actually kind of a difficult question in a way," he says. "There have been so many seasons in my career. I mean, I was lucky to have a measure of success where my music became more and more popular, and to join a group—the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet—that became very popular. And as a composer I had other streams of creation that had a great return for me, both emotionally and somewhat

financially. I've gained a lot of experience over the years, and I have more tools in the toolbox."

But on the other hand, he notes, "nothing is different, really. I still use the same processes. I always just did it by what interested me, you know? You can't write for other people. Quite early, I boiled it down to the very simple idea of comfort and discomfort. If I'm comfortable with a piece—and that's a hard state to reach—it's essentially done."

AN UNRELENTING INTELLECT

Music isn't York's only pursuit. He has an unrelenting intellect. "And the problem with a mind like that is it interferes with the artistic process," he says. "A fast and active intellect will want to take control of everything, and I learned very early that that's a very bad idea for an artist."

As a way of feeding his intellect, of keeping it separate from his composing, York works on physics and mathematical problems. About three years ago, he bought a book called *Journey Through Genius: The Great Theorems of Mathematics* by William Dunham. "It is full of equations, like the history of theorems and things like that," and having vowed to read and understand it, he signed up with Khan Academy, an online learning service that offers instruction on a wide variety of subjects. There, he worked through algebra, linear algebra, calculus, and matrix theory. "I'm able to learn vast amounts in a short period of time," he says. York has even had articles on math published in scholarly journals (and included them on his website).

Still, with his intellect otherwise engaged, York is able to allow a "deeper undercurrent of being to illuminate the [musical] ideas that come through. And that's a very rewarding way to work. I've never seemed to lack for ideas. I'm not saying they're always good, but there's always music available. I pick up the guitar, and there's a melody in my mind, and I just play it. It happens all the time. Daily. And I don't know why."

It has been that way since his childhood.

"When I was a boy—probably eight, ten years old—I would be in the back seat in the car, and I specifically remember one time realizing that I have a radio in my head and that there was like a switch, a mental switch, and I could just turn it on, and symphonic music, or any kind of music, would play, and I could direct it. I could make it more intense or chatter more—you know, the violins would start doing quicker runs—or I could just let it play like a radio station. I didn't have the skills to write it down, but I could just listen to it, and I would do this. I'd turn it on, and I'd turn it off, and put my attention somewhere else. So that's still there."

He grows reflective. "And I mean, sure, there's been ups and downs. There are times I thought maybe I'm done, that I don't really have anything more to say. Sometimes I go through some extended periods without writing things. Sometimes I've gone *months* without writing anything. That's kind of typical, actually. And yeah, I've had a love/hate relationship with the guitar. Sometimes I don't really want to play it anymore. Some days it sounds like crap. But I just take this as a natural now. You're not always surfing the waves. Sometimes you're underneath, trying to figure out if you can come up for air. But I think after years and years of experiencing those kinds of sinusoidal changes in creativity, you begin to trust that it will come back around. Especially if you have reasons to sustain you.

"So, to circle back to the original idea, when it comes down to it now, I think I still do music because it seems like a really beautiful thing to do, to create these things that I think are beautiful and to put them out there in the world. You know, I don't have the hubris to think that that necessarily improves the world a lot, but it gives people something that's beautiful that they can put into their consciousness and maybe that helps."

'I pick up the guitar, and there's a melody in my mind, and I just play it. It happens all the time. Daily. And I don't know why.'
–ANDREW YORK

AN EXPRESSIVE CREATURE

As a guitarist, York has often been celebrated for the complex, singing, sensual tone of his playing. I mention to him that it has always amazed me that different pianists can bring such different sounds out of the piano, a mechanical object, after all, with three removes—keys, hammers, strings—between the players and the sound.

"I mean, you'd never mistake Art Tatum for Bill Evans," I say.

"No, that's true."

"And you've talked about playing with personality and color and not just dry, if perfect, technique, and so, I'm wondering what you'd advise a player to do to put more of his or her inner life into their playing?"

"Well, first of all," he says, "I think we're expressive creatures, and for piano, it's not that hard to imagine why different players sound different. The ones that are good and have an identity have a certain feeling that they're expressing when they play, and it affects the velocity of their keystrokes, and the amount of space between them, and how fast they released them, and all these things give a different apparent character to the piano. So, even though it is a machine and there's a much smaller range of what you can do to make it sound different, there is enough where it can be somewhat dramatic".

He mentions Chick Corea. "Man, you can't miss him when he plays. He has a crispness that's in his nerves. He has a quickness in pressing the keys, and this incredibly crisp release and this incredible sense of time. It just flows out, and again I think it has to do with his intent, his feeling, and the way he's able to attack those keys and release them."

And the guitar, he says, is an even richer medium for sound, "because we have so much control over the tone. We touch the strings with both hands, and we can do all these unimaginable things compared to a pianist. We can get beyond an array of color and just pluck in different ways—that's incredible.

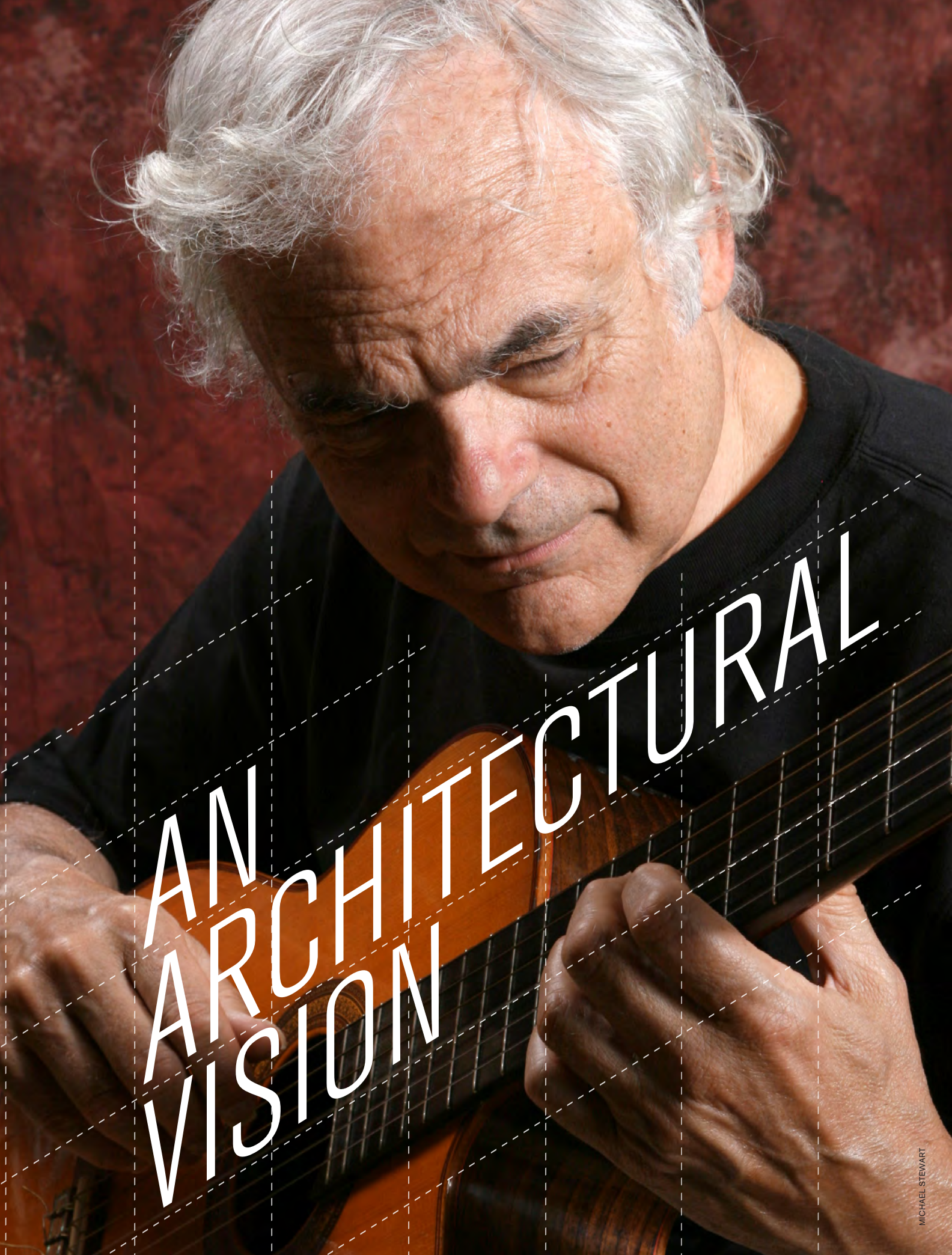
"But how do you put your inner life into that? Well, first you have to *have* an inner life. And I don't mean that sarcastically," he says, "but I'm often appalled by the lack of curiosity of many, many people. I ask some people, 'What do you find fascinating?' and they can't think of anything! I mean, if you asked me the question, you'd have to shut me up after ten minutes, you know?"

"Which hardly seems possible," I say.

"Right!" York says. "So, first of all, give yourself an inner life! Go look for it. Try to find some way to relate to concepts that you find beautiful and that will percolate through your whole being and come out through your instrument. And if you have that intent inside, you will use whatever technique you have at your disposal to express those feelings and ideas. I can't see it happening any other way. It's not how you technically approach the instrument. That has nothing to do with it in a way, or not much.

"You think about an old blues guy whose technique is rudimentary at best, but he's playing really cool licks, and you're like, 'Wow, that sounds so good!' because that's how he's feeling it. He's not going to be playing Bach, but what he's doing is awesome.

"So, it has to start with something internal, and I can't show you how to do that. I mean, you've got to go read some poetry or go stare at a tree for 20 minutes. Those are much better exercises than 'Let me show you how to move your hands.'" AG



AN ARCHITECTURAL VISION

MICHAEL STEWART

Gene Bertoncini and his unique nylon-string approach to jazz

BY KATE KOENIG

Over the course of his five-decade career, guitarist Gene Bertoncini has worked with innumerable musical greats spanning many different styles, from jazz—his specialty—to pop to Brazilian. He's played with legends like Benny Goodman, Wayne Shorter, Carmen McRae, Buddy Rich, and Lena Horne. He worked as a sideman on recordings by Tony Bennett, Chet Baker, Nancy Wilson, Bette Midler, Paul Winter, Paul Desmond, and Astrud Gilberto. He shared a stage with Luciano Pavarotti, and on television was a member of the band on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* and *The Merv Griffin Show*. He's also made close to 20 albums under his own name. Even at the age of 83, he remains in high demand, playing gigs around New York City and still traveling around the country for others.

I first met Bertoncini about five years ago at the "jazz church"—Saint Peter's Church in Manhattan, where he often performs. He'll introduce every musician he mentions as "great," just to remind you of the praise his friends deserve, and anyone who knows him knows how much his friends are his family. During a solo set at New York's Bar Next Door in early April of 2019, he said hello to most of the audience in the packed room during his set. At that show and others, I saw him working through his arrangement of Marilyn and Alan Bergman's "Love Like Ours."

From that inspiration, Bertoncini recorded a new album, *Love Like Ours: Duets with Gene Bertoncini and Friends*, with a release date not yet announced at press time. I connected with him over FaceTime last spring, and he answered questions while playing his new Aaron Green classical guitar.

How have you been doing?

I've been stuck inside, but I've been trying to learn some new tunes. I've been working on an arrangement of "April in Paris."

Tell me about the new album.

It's called *Love Like Ours: Duets with Gene Bertoncini and Friends*. There are five duets, and maybe a couple of solo takes. One with Jeff Hamilton, just drums and guitar; then Bill Charlap, piano and guitar; Sara Caswell, she's a wonderful violinist; Terell Stafford, a great trumpet player; Mike Mainieri, great vibraphone player; and a great singer, Alan Bergman. He's singing a song that I like, "Love Like Ours." I really feel so good about that song and that Alan Bergman's actually going to be singing it with me accompanying him. I was singing it every day in my car falling in love with the lyrics. There's a nice amount of interplay that happens with all these musicians; improvisation, but conversations. All these guys are my favorite people and musicians. It's going to be a great album, a marvelous album.

'I like the idea of preparing something for an audience rather than just getting up there and showing off.'
–GENE BERTONCINI

Do you remember when you first fell in love with the guitar?

Yes, I do. My dad played guitar in our house in the Bronx, and he used to sing and play Italian songs. Music was in my house all my life, and I could never play enough music for my father. He loved it so much. It was a wonderful thing to have a father like that, who really believed in me and really loved what I did. It was all very supportive, and he came down to hear me play a number of times.

I think the desire to work at something is such a great gift. I used to go out, even when I was an early teenager, like 14, 15; I'd go to clubs just to hear players like Johnny Smith, who was my first teacher. He was a great guitarist. And Chuck Wayne later on . . . he was also a great guitarist. I was very lucky to get the encouragement from people like that.

You went to college for architecture. Did that influence your music at all?

The thing about studying architecture is it awakens your mind to the needs of other people. When you prepare a design for a client, whether it's a house, a store, or a school, the design is determined by the needs of the people—plus the site that it's on, the orientation of the sun, and your knowledge of materials and stuff like that. You're thinking of the needs of people when you're designing. I always felt that way about the guitar. You're balancing your program, your composition. There's a design to every jazz solo, too. I've heard some great jazz solos, they're all kind of balanced out. I like the idea of preparing something for an audience rather than just getting up there and showing off.

When was it that you realized you could actually make a career out of music?

I played and got gigs because I was pretty good, so there was always money coming in just from that. And after I graduated I got a job with an architecture firm, with a protégé of Frank Lloyd Wright. At the same time, I was playing with a big band on the weekend. And that night at the dance when I was playing, I messed up the guitar part. Nobody heard it, but I knew. I said, "I gotta practice. I can't do this." So the next day I quit the architecture office. It was an eye-opener. I realized that the guitar was what I wanted to do.

When were you first introduced to classical guitar?
[My teacher] Chuck Wayne taught me to listen to the music of Julian Bream. That just changed my life. There was a particular recording, *The Art of Julian Bream*, and one piece by [Maurice] Ravel on there ["Pavane pour une infante défunte"] was really amazing. So I started taking classical guitar lessons. So many musicians in New York were doing the same thing at the time. And just about that time came the bossa nova—João Gilberto and his wife, Astrud Gilberto, "Corcovado," "The Girl from Ipanema," all those recordings. He became a friend of mine. He used to borrow my guitar every time he came to New York from Brazil.

João Gilberto used to borrow your guitar?
Yeah. No one played the bossa like him. The clarity of his chords . . . I was very fortunate.

Can you tell me about the guitar you play now?
The guitar I used on most of my recordings, was made by a guy named John Buscarino about 20 years ago. I have found it to be a



COURTESY OF GENE BERTONCINI



beautifully-easy-to-play, warm-sounding acoustic guitar. And over the years I've dropped it, cracked it, repaired it. It's a veteran guitar and people think that because I've dropped it, it sounds better; I don't know. I bought a new guitar by a guy named Aaron Green, a new classical guitar. It's almost like you have a built-in amplifier, because it has such a wonderful, strong sound, and I love playing it because of that quality particularly. I just played a couple of notes and it sounded good, right?

You've taught at Eastman School of Music, NYU, and still teach at William Paterson University. Is there anything you particularly enjoy about teaching?

When I first started teaching at Eastman, I never even knew I could teach, but I had learned a lot about the machinations of the guitar and my sense of harmony. I had an idea about learning about the fingerboard that was quite different. Instead of playing scales, which I always did in position, I started playing scales on each string, like horizontally on the guitar almost like a piano, so you could see the intervals. Then I play scales on two strings at a time in seconds and thirds. And I taught that way, too. You have to get my book—it's called *Approaching the Guitar*.

Can you talk more about your approach to arranging?

With the study of all the scales, intervals, really learning about the fingerboard, you can create special chord voicings, and you get a sense of respect for each of the strings. I started designing chords—some of them with open strings in the middle. You take a thing like the G string and see it as the function of all the bass notes. Let's take a B string for instance. B is the fifth of E, right? It's the sharp 11th of F, it's the 11th of F♯, it's the third of G, it's the ninth of A, it's the flat nine of B♭. It's got all these functions as an open string. Then you put two strings together in seconds; you take a C scale and you hit the D and the E together on the B and the E string, and then play E and F together, little seconds and thirds. And then three strings together and thirds and fourths. Really learning about the instrument and the sounds the intervals themselves create, both melodically and harmonically.

What's one of your favorite arrangements that you've done?

On my arrangement of "Body and Soul" on my album of the same name, the melody is at some points inside the chord, on top of the chord, and at the bottom of the chord. If anything, it's kind of an overplayed tune in jazz; I wanted to do something a little different with it. And on my "Giant Steps" arrangement, every chord has an open string in it. So that's an interesting arrangement, too.

I like the idea of preparing—that's why I always try to come up with an arrangement for any song I have a concept for, so I can present it as something special. But I also may not feel that secure with the arrangement, so I go for something that really feels secure. Or there's somebody in the audience that I think would like this kind of thing, or sometimes there's somebody that scares me, so I don't play some things, you know? He or she's not going to think this is very hip, so I leave it out. Also, somebody's interviewing me for *Acoustic Guitar* magazine. That's a big a thing. I must be doing something right. AG






Thompson
THOMPSON GUITARS





TOP GEAR

THE BEST OF 2020

In the midst of a global pandemic, the guitar market flourishes with high demand for its range of offerings

BY GREG OLWELL

In a normal year, golf clubs, bicycles, and guitars don't have a whole lot in common, but 2020 was anything but normal. When dining out and attending sporting events and concerts became impossible, industry reports indicate that activities like golfing, bicycling, and playing musical instruments became wildly popular. Store inventories cleared out as people decided to pick up a new hobby or rekindle an old one. This led to extreme pressure on the supply chain at a time when guitar makers like Taylor, Martin, and Collings were forced to close for months.

With factories back in limited operation, the supply of fresh guitars remains far behind the pent-up demand at a time when shops are reporting sales of new and used guitars are at unprecedented levels—despite uncertain economic times. The trend among some of the bigger names in the acoustic market is familiar: introducing no-frills guitars that fit the reality of many players' wallets. And mid-priced instruments continue to offer new features, such as innovative electronics, alternative woods, refined construction, and reliably good tones.

As for our part, to give you more of the up-to-date gear reviews and perspective that you expect from *Acoustic Guitar,* we added reviews of strings, accessories, stage and studio equipment, and, of course, guitars that you'll find only on AcousticGuitar.com.

All prices shown are what you can expect to pay in a store or online, unless otherwise noted.

GUITARS, GUITARS, AND MORE GUITARS

Always quick to respond to change, Taylor introduced a new line of guitars made in the United States out of all-solid woods, at price points between the 200 and 300 series. The American Dream series applies a formula of stripped-down appointments and interesting wood choices, paired with the recent Grand Pacific shape and V-Class bracing. We checked out the **Taylor American Dream AD27** ($1,399), with a mahogany top, sapele back and sides, and eucalyptus fretboard and bridge. Our reviewer likened the AD27's playability and appearance to a pair of worn-in jeans, rich with Taylor's signature sustain and treble clarity. There's also a spruce-and-ovangkol model, the AD17, and both guitars are available with Taylor's ES2 electronics for an additional $200.

We also looked at two new additions to Andy Powers' **Builder's Edition** guitars, the **324ce** and **816ce** ($2,999 and $3,999, respectively), which feature nonstandard appointments like integrated arm bevels, soundports, unique finishes, and more. The **Grand Auditorium 324ce** has a mahogany top on urban ash back and sides, harvested from Southern California street trees—a recipe for great frequency balance, sustain, and

Clockwise from top: Collings 001 14-Fret, Preston Thompson 000-14SBA, Beard A-Model Odyssey, New World Guitars P640S FS

SHOP FAVORITES

Whether dropping off repairs or taking lessons or trying out guitars, almost nothing about shopping for guitars and accessories is like it was before the pandemic. Richard Johnston of Gryphon Stringed Instruments in Palo Alto, California, says, "For people who play music, it's made playing music more important to them. We also have a number of people who are saying, 'I've always wanted to play guitar and I just didn't have any time.'"

But now, many have the time—and stores are struggling to keep up with the demand. From online powerhouses to smaller brick-and-mortar shops, I spoke with a few of the retailers navigating new challenges that have made them reorganize their businesses under new guidelines. I also asked them for their takes on top gear for 2020.

HOW HAS COVID-19 AFFECTED YOUR BUSINESS?

Steve Miklas, owner, Acoustic Music Works, Pittsburgh, PA

We've focused on repairs and internet sales and have really upped our social-media game on Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, as well as our monthly newsletter. Sales of musical instruments via our website slowed in March but picked up in April and May, and by June hit record levels. July and August were also very strong, so we are on track to have a great year, in spite of—or partially because of—the new reality of social isolation and quarantine. It seems that folks stuck working from home and in quarantine decided to take our advice and pass the time with a new guitar, banjo, or mandolin.

Frank Navarro, director of Guitar Gallery operations at Sweetwater, Fort Wayne, IN

We moved into our new 480,000-square-foot distribution center in February 2020—just before the pandemic hit—with the mindset that we'd have plenty of space to handle the current needs of the business, with room to grow. We soon realized that wasn't the case and we started utilizing 50 percent more production area by adding a third line for processing and creating a new weekend shift. As a result, we just

Taylor American Dream AD27



resonance. The larger **Grand Symphony 816ce** employs Lutz spruce and Indian rosewood with a distinctive soundport in its cutaway, producing abundant headroom and powerful tone.

With thriftiness in mind, Gibson added to its Studio line of updated classics made from spruce and sustainable walnut. An unbeatable buy for an all-solid, U.S.-made guitar, the **Gibson G-45 Studio** ($999) has "no lack of harmonic richness and overtones in the top end, and plenty of midrange projection, making it a solid choice as an all-purpose acoustic," according to our reviewer.

With an offset waist, heel-less cutaway, and vivid blue rosette, the **Martin SC-13E** ($1,499) looks like it just dropped in from the future. Built from the ground up to be a high-performing acoustic-electric, this striking guitar has a solid Sitka spruce top and koa/mahogany laminated back and sides, along with a comfy, low-profile neck shaped with the electric player in mind. Our reviewer found that the SC-13E delivered Martin's signature sound of great balance, detailed highs, woody mids, and compact lows. In the same price range, the spruce-and-maple **Eastman AC622CE** ($1,705) is a cutaway grand auditorium, offering a refined package with its chamfered edges, soundport, and tastefully unique inlays.

To the surprise of absolutely nobody who took notice of Fender's American Acoustasonic Telecaster, the company expanded the innovative line with the **Fender American Acoustasonic Stratocaster** ($1,999). This Strat-shaped hybrid guitar features a resonating spruce top (optionally available in cocobolo or ziricote, for $3,299) over a hollowed-out mahogany body. As with the Tele version, a very interesting onboard electronics package lets players quickly select classic acoustic and electric guitar tones—or a blend of both.

With its exceptional sound, compact 00 size, and dynamic agility, the new **Collings 001 14-Fret** ($4,299) might be the ultimate couch guitar that's also ready for just about any gig. And in a similar vein, the **B&G Guitars Caletta** ($3,499) is a 12-fret model that works well for fingerpickers and strummers who prefer comfort and balanced tones over a draft horse-sized instrument.

Midrange guitars can offer exciting packages with big playability and great tones. This year we saw several instruments that stood out in this category. Made with sustainable, all-solid woods (including a torrefied European spruce top), the **Breedlove Organic Signature Concert Copper CE** ($599) merges tasteful design with sustainably harvested woods for a guitar that is lively, punchy, and dry. With a pro-level L.R.

Martin SC-13E



Baggs pickup, the solid African mahogany **Orangewood Sage Mahogany Live** ($945) produces thick and chewy mids, glittering highs, and nice low-end definition.

The **PRS SE T60E Tonare** ($1,049) uses the company's hybrid X-bracing, combining a traditional X brace with fan bracing usually seen in classical guitars. This spruce-ziricote offering features PRS' trademark headstock in a guitar with bold low-end and bold visuals. The elegant-looking **Washburn Bella Tono Elegante S24S** ($469) hit the target for a rich tone with full clarity and projection in a smallish body with a comfortable neck. Besides its distinctive headstock, the **D'Angelico Tammany Premier LS** ($299) is an acoustic-electric mahogany OM that may have little in common with the archtops made by the company's masterful namesake, but it delivers a lot for the money.

With a unique finish and some bracing tweaks that distinguish it from other guitars in its lineup, the limited-edition **Recording King Dirty 30's Deluxe Single-0** ($449) has all-solid woods and electronics in a small-bodied guitar that looks like a treasure from grandpa's attic. A remake of a rare 1960s dreadnought, the **Epiphone Masterbilt Excellente** ($899) is a strummer-friendly guitar with onboard electronics. Rounding out our midrange coverage was the **Lava Me 2**, a $799 guitar with onboard effects and a one-piece carbon-fiber body that's impervious to the elements. This unusual instrument delivers surprisingly good tones and is available in several outrageous colors.

Nylon-string guitars can offer players a lot of expressiveness and comfort, and makers are offering instruments with features that close the gap between the familiar feel of a steel-string and the dulcet tones of a classical guitar. With a cutaway, relatively short scale and narrow nut, and electronics, **New World Guitars' P640S FS** ($1,900) was designed by luthier Kenny Hill to appeal to the fingerstyle steel-string guitarist who wants to paint with a new brush.

With its onboard signal processing that delivers reverb and chorus effects without an amp, the **Yamaha CG-TA TransAcoustic** ($650) shoehorns a lot of fun and inspiration into a comfortable nylon-string. At the other end of the price spectrum, the **Lowden WL-35 Jazz** ($7,600) shows the maker's attention to detail and premium woods in a parlor-size nylon with clarity and quickness that works great for pick and fingerstyle playing.

As for resonator guitars, the brilliantly voiced **Beard A-Model Odyssey** ($3,900) has a spider-cone setup and delivers warm and full sounds with more bass power than you might expect from a spider-cone model. At $1,149, the **Gold Tone PBS D Paul Beard Signature** is

completed a 50,000-square-foot addition that makes even more space for growth.

When the state of Indiana issued stay-at-home orders, founder and president Chuck Surack continued to pay everyone and Sweetwater has not laid off or furloughed a single person. For those employees whose jobs weren't able to be done from home, we found other ways for them to contribute and stay employed. We had to change some of the workflow to meet the needs of our employees and customers. Despite challenges, we were able to pivot quickly, and sales have skyrocketed, with some months surpassing our best ever. Added sales brought the need for additional support so we've added new team members to keep up with the existing guitar demand and influx of gear as it is received, inspected, and photographed.

Richard Johnston, co-founder, Gryphon Stringed Instruments, Palo Alto, CA

We don't need as much retail staff because we don't have the same number of people in the store, but the email load is off the charts because everyone has to make appointments to come into the store. We ask people to tell us what they want to try out, because if we have three people wanting to try out resophonic guitars, we have a problem because they're all in the same room. We're also actively seeking used instruments because we can't get enough new instruments from our regular suppliers to meet the demand.

Our guitar instructor, Carol McComb, found a downside because she couldn't teach classes here, but she was able to reconnect with old students from all over the country through video lessons and classes and find new students.

HAVE YOU NOTICED ANY CHANGES IN WHAT IS POPULAR?

Navarro: People are playing and buying more instruments than I've seen in my 25-plus years in the music industry. There are days where we receive a shipment from a vendor and the bulk of that shipment is already sold and waiting to go out to our customers. The mid-priced guitars have seen a bit of an increase in

demand, but that doesn't mean sales have slowed down on guitars at the higher price points. Our customers are still buying Martin D-28s, Gibson J-45s, and Taylor 814ces at an amazing rate.

Johnston: There is an interest in more intimate guitars—the light-construction instruments that are small enough that you're holding them rather than crawling over them.

Miklas: Brands that have been particularly resilient for us include Eastman, Waterloo, McPherson, and Calton. Also, consignments have picked up, and we have our choice of high-end acoustics being consigned by Baby Boomers who are all in the mode of "thinning the herd."



Waterloo WL-AT Scissortail

PERSONAL FAVORITES

Michael John Simmons, Gryphon: I really like all of the Builder's Editions that Andy Powers at Taylor has been coming up with recently. They are solidly in the Taylor tradition but expand on it in some intriguing ways. I'm particularly taken with the 652ce, a guitar that draws on the 12-string's long history and modernizes the design in a thoughtful way. Martin's new SC-13E is a guitar I find myself playing often in idle moments. The cutaway is an amazing piece of woodworking and makes it a dream to play above the 12th fret, a place I don't often visit on an acoustic guitar.



Orange Crush Acoustic 30

a Dobro-style squareneck lap steel that covers all of the basics for a player looking for high performance in a traditional package.

The Brazilian rosewood and 41-style appointments added considerably to the cost of our most expensive test model, the **Preston Thompson 000-14SBA** ($15,490), but the result was a guitar with the sort of breathtaking and spectacular tone and craftsmanship you'd expect from such a rich guitar. Oppositely, the least costly instrument we've reviewed, the **Loog Mini** ($79 direct) is a child's (or adult's) three-steel-string gateway to playing guitar.

STRINGS AND THINGS

There have never been so many options when it comes to guitar strings, and we checked out a couple of promising new sets. **SIT American Roots Monel** ($8.44) strings cater to the folks who hunger for the warm sounds of the strings of yesteryear. **Sonotone** positions itself as a premium string maker, and our reviewer found the **Symphonic phosphor-bronze strings** ($18.99) to have great, bright (and not brash) sound and sustain.

If you've ever had your guitar slip off your strap, or just live in fear of it happening, then look for the $19.99 **Music Nomad Acousti-Lok**. It replaces your acoustic-electric guitar's endpin jack with a clever device that allows you to use a strap lock with a guitar fitted with an output jack/strap button.

An organic material called casein has been finding favor with some flatpick fanatics and boutique pick makers. Accessory powerhouse **D'Addario** now offers its own heavy-gauge **Casein picks** (starting at $21.99) that deliver clarity and presence while mellowing out those harsh tones.

STAGE AND STUDIO

Until mid-March, 2020 was turning into a great year for gigs, but since gatherings have been put on hold, stages have seemed lonely and quiet. When the time arrives for more performances, there are some nice new sound reinforcement tools for acoustic guitarists that are worth knowing about.

On the smaller side, the **Orange Crush Acoustic 30** ($399) is a 30-watt, two-channel 1x8 combo that can be powered by ten AA batteries or via a wall outlet, so it's something of a busker's delight. With five channels, 400 watts of power, two eight-inch speakers, and a one-inch horn, the **Schertler Roy** ($2,088) caught our attention when it debuted two years ago. With its bountiful input options, semi-parametric EQ, and quality onboard effects, the Roy has as much power and flexibility as many of the portable PAs on the market, but in a compact


DPA
4099 CORE

combo form. Like the Schertler, the **AER MM200** ($1,999) wasn't new for 2020, but this compact, powerful combo amp warranted coverage. A signature model for Monte Montgomery, it delivers 200 watts to its twin eight-inch speakers and turns hard-hitting, piezo-squawking strums into punchy, focused tone.

It's near impossible to match the sound quality of a guitar through a good microphone, and we checked out a few good ones. The **DPA 4099 CORE** ($619) condenser mic improves the clarity, openness, and consistency of its predecessor to give guitarists more natural sounds for recording or stage use. This petite mic attaches to your guitar using a safe bracket and a flexible gooseneck, so that you can dial in exactly the sound you want.

Just as guitars come in many flavors, so do microphones. For the home recording enthusiast, this can quickly become an expensive obsession. The **Townsend Labs Sphere L22 microphone system** ($1,499) uses a large diaphragm mic that can be used on its own or with a collection of plug-ins that mimic many desirable (and fabulously expensive) mics and has software that allows you to change the mic after recording.

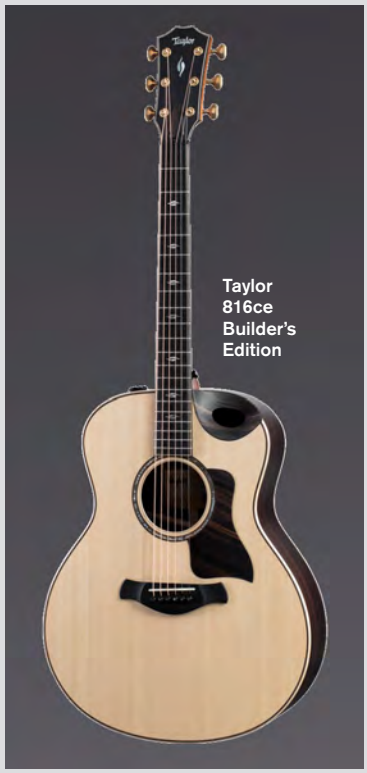
Magnetic pickups can offer players tones they just can't get any other way, and **Curtis Novak** is one of the most respected pickup builders in the game. Novak's **magnetic soundhole pickups** include a very hip gold foil ($225) patterned after vintage DeArmonds, and a slimline humbucker ($195). Our reviewer found that these pickups offered warm sounds and controllable feedback.

Effects give players tremendous power on stage or in the studio. Looking sweet in their woodgrain cases, the **L.R. Baggs Align Series Delay** and **Chorus** pedals ($179 each) enhance and expand your guitar's sonic possibilities while preserving its acoustic character. With four slots for pedals, a built-in DI, tuner, and speaker simulator, the **Nexi Acoustic Pedalboard** ($229) aims to check all the boxes that an acoustic guitarist might need in a pedalboard. The Nexi system includes a reverb pedal and you can add the company's compressor, looper, or chorus—all analog with true bypass—or your own favorites.

Though the humble DI is less than glamorous, its ability to prepare your guitar tone for the mixing board is critical. The **Radial HDI High Definition Studio DI** ($799) is a pro-quality DI with extensive outputs for flexible routing for the studio. With construction rugged enough for studio or stage use, the HDI has two signal paths, one clean (with an optical compressor) and one heavily adjustable using a Color control, which can add anything from clean warmth to crunchy distortion. AG

I've also been experimenting with different flatpicks and have been blown away by how different shapes and materials affect my tone and technique. For example, the beveled edge of the Wegen M350 just glides across the strings, and the thickness of the pick mellows the tone a bit and tempers the brightness of an acoustic archtop. I also really like the Dunlop 206, another thick pick with rounded edges, and one that is much cheaper than a Wegen. By varying the tightness of my grip, I find I can get a much wider dynamic range from my picking than I can with a thinner pick.

Navarro: **I have two favorites and they fall on different ends of the spectrum. The PRS SE Parlor guitar that was introduced earlier this**


Taylor
816ce
Builder's
Edition

summer [reviewed on p. 68]; they did a great job at a really reasonable price point. My other favorite acoustic this year is Taylor's 816ce Builder's Edition. The volume that this guitar can put out with the clarity you get from it is something I lean toward, and the soundport built in the cutaway makes you do a double take.

Chord-Melody Made Easy(ish)

The first lesson in a new series about harmonizing melodies on the fretboard

BY GREG RUBY

Greg Ruby



COURTESY OF GREG RUBY

THE PROBLEM

You want to learn chord-melody-style playing but aren't quite sure where to begin.

THE SOLUTION

Invest a little bit of time learning the inversions for a dominant-seventh chord, and the classic jazz standard "Whispering" should fall right under your fingers.

1 EXPLORE THE ROOTS OF CHORD-MELODY

From roughly the 1920s through the 1940s, guitarists made their bread in rhythm sections. Wrapped around archtops, they strummed steady quarter notes, propelling dancers across the floor and providing percussive harmony for the band. Occasionally, a bandleader would give a guitarist a solo. Single notes on an acoustic guitar, even a large archtop, would sound small and nearly inaudible against a full horn section. So the guitarist would play chords on the higher strings and with varied rhythms. While the result sounded complex, the approach was simple. With the highest note of the chord as the melody—*voilà*!—one could play accompaniment and lead simultaneously.

This type of chordal soloing made it necessary for guitarists to use the entire length of the fretboard, as the notes on the top strings provided both greater projection and range in big-band settings. So that you can get a sense of these harmonies, **Example 1** shows how to voice a three-note G chord with the highest note moving from the root to the third to the fifth, while **Example 2** demonstrates a chord-melody snippet of "Mary Had a Little Lamb" using two of the shapes.

2 TRY SOME CHORD INVERSIONS

Knowing inversions is essential to understanding chord-melody, as it assures that you will have an appropriate voicing to place below the melody. An inversion is simply rearranging the order of the notes of the chord to make a new top (melody) note. This will give you a voicing for the root, third, fifth, or seventh as the melody note. Four inversions of a G7 chord are shown in **Example 3**.

If a melody note is not a member of the chord, you must add it to the voicing. Since G7 is the V chord in the key of C major, you can use the notes from the C major scale (C D E F G A B) to create a G7 chord/scale (**Example 4**). This allows you to find the other diatonic melody notes for a dominant seventh chord. In a future lesson, I'll walk you through the process of creating an inversion for any chord.

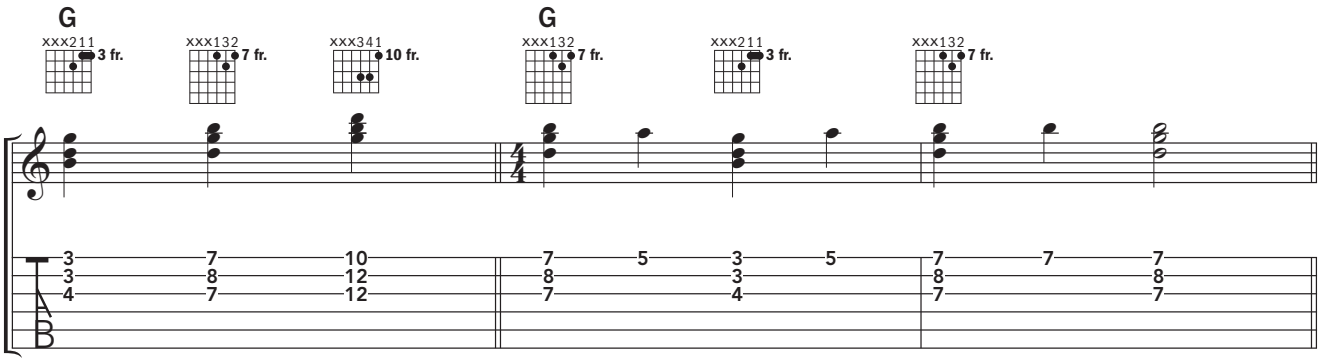
3 PLAY A JAZZ STANDARD

"Whispering" (**Example 5**) has been recorded by everyone from Les Paul to Louis Armstrong. My particular favorite is a solo guitar version by Oscar Alemán. This arrangement can be played either with a pick or fingerstyle. Start with the familiar F chord in the first position (F on string 4, fret 3; A on string 3, fret 2; C on string 2, fret 1; and F on string 1, fret 1). Move this shape to the eighth fret, where it becomes a C triad (C E G). In bar 1, the triad follows the melody to harmonize the melody. However, in the next measu re, you need to add a D, which is not part of the C chord. Simply play the D on string 1, fret 10 with your fourth finger to create a Cadd9 chord.

In measures 3 and 4, use the inversions of a B7 chord to harmonize the melody notes B (root note) and A (flatted seventh). If you're playing with a pick, use a rest stroke to land on the high E string—this gives your B string note greater projection and guarantees you won't accidentally strike the E string.

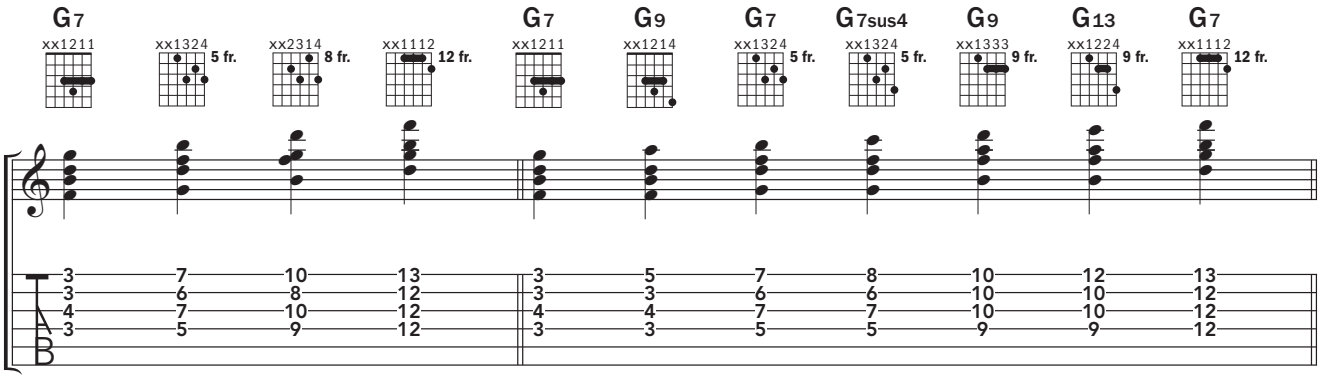
In bars 7 and 8, the A7 voicing is re-fingered, as it omits the high E-string note. Measure 7

Example 1



Example 2

Example 3



Example 4

Example 5

"Whispering"

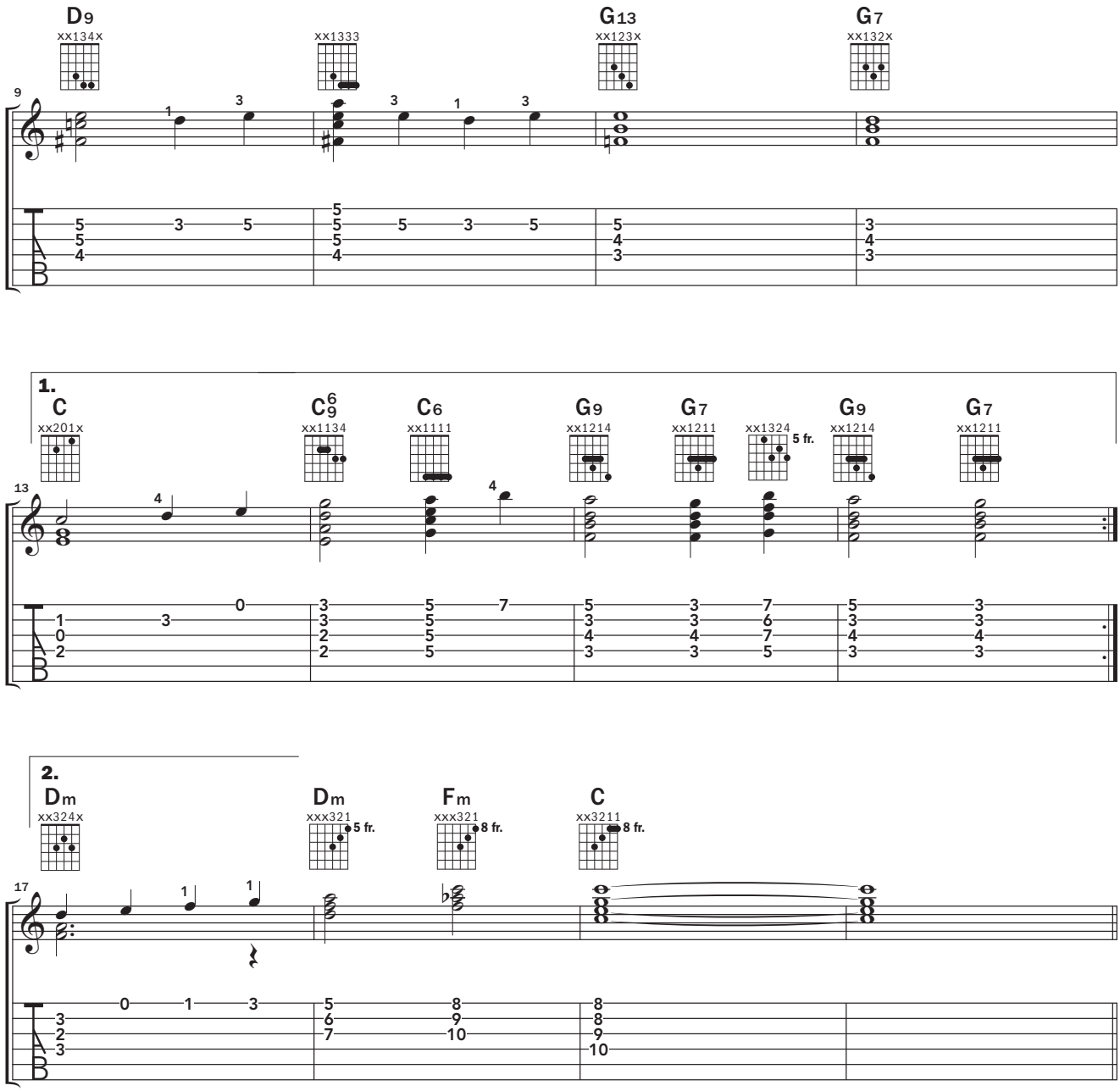


adds the note F, thus changing the chord name to A7♯5. The melody moves quickly in bars 9 and 10. To accommodate this, let go of a chord completely and just play the melody as single notes in between the chords—a nice change of texture that gives your fretting fingers a little break.

The G7 in measure 11 includes the melody note E, making the chord a G13, which resolves to a similar shape as in bar eight. Measures 14–16 require the fourth finger to lead. Keep that finger lightly touching the first string when moving it between the B on beat 4 of measure 14 and the G9 chord of measure 15. This same idea—using the fourth finger as an anchor—occurs between measures 15 and 16. In general, it is helpful to look for common fingers between chord shapes, for smoother transitions. In measure 17, let go of the Dm shape on beat 4 to play the note G with your first finger. This will prepare you for the A note in the higher Dm voicing of the following measure. Move that shape up three frets to make the Fm before resolving back to C.

Take your time to slowly practice the transition between the chords. Use any two voicings or small sections to create mini etudes. Until we can all safely make music together again, chord-melody is a fulfilling way to play all the parts. I hope this arrangement brings joy to your woodshedding.

Greg Ruby is a guitarist, composer, historian, and educator specializing in jazz from the first half of the 20th century. His latest book is The Oscar Alemán Play-Along Songbook, Vol. 1. *Ruby teaches Zoom lessons and classes. For more information, visit gregrubymusic.com.*





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Clean Sweeps

Picking approaches guaranteed to add excitement to your single-note lines

BY RON JACKSON

If you've spent much time listening to jazz guitar virtuosos like George Benson and Tal Farlow, shredders like Yngwie Malmsteen and Tony MacAlpine, or fusion players like Frank Gambale, then you've no doubt heard plenty of sweep picking. This efficient technique involves using a plectrum to play a series of single notes on adjacent strings in a consecutive motion, rather than alternating pick strokes, resulting in a fast, fluid sound.

You don't need to be a pyrotechnical electric player to benefit from having some sweep-picking moves under your belt, as the approach works just as well on the acoustic guitar. In this lesson, I'll show you the nuts and bolts of sweep picking through a series of exercises all around the fretboard designed to get you comfortable with the technique. Most of these figures might seem more gymnastic than musical, but we'll close things out in Week Four with a jazzy etude that shows how sweep picking can be used in a fun context.

WEEK ONE

To get your picking hand accustomed to the sweeping movement, you'll start the first week using just the open strings. Your goal is to get a feel for picking in the same direction across two or more strings. In **Example 1**, sweep down across two strings at a time, starting between the sixth and fifth strings and continuing the pattern through the second and first strings. Pick these two notes in one continuous motion, rather than two discrete strokes. Start this exercise slowly at first, and make sure that everything sounds connected. Let your pick land on the second note of each two-string pair. Next try the same thing, but with upstrokes, again starting with the bottom two strings (**Example 2**).

In **Example 3**, you'll do a downward, then upward sweep on each string pair. Try continuing the pattern till you get to strings 2 and 1, then go backwards if you'd like. **Examples 4a–4c** extend the idea to cover three strings at time. Work on all of these open-string patterns until you get a feel for the sweeping action and can play the examples at a moderately fast clip.

WEEK TWO

This week you'll start using your fretting hand in playing strings across two and three strings up and down the neck. Be sure to fret each of

Beginners' Tip #1

At the end of a sweep, allow your pick to come to rest on an adjacent string.

Beginners' Tip #2

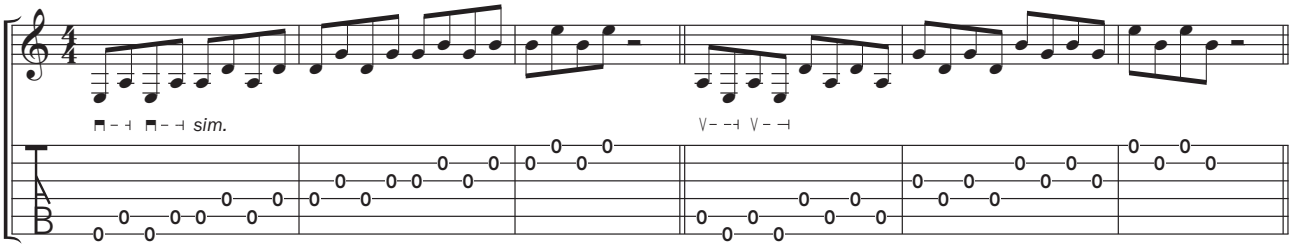
When you are sweep picking, your right hand (or left, if that's your dominant hand) should feel free of tension—as if you're gliding over the strings.

the notes in a single pick stroke in advance. This will help with efficiency and coordination between both hands. In **Example 5**, you'll sweep some diatonic thirds within the C major scale (C D E F G A B) between the fifth and fourth strings, all in downstrokes. Continue the pattern up an octave, to the C–E dyad at frets 15 and 14 on strings 5 and 4, and then go back down again for good measure. Also based on the C scale, **Example 6** moves across the fretboard. Try this with all downstrokes, as indicated, and then with upstrokes, switching the order of the notes in each pair. For instance, the first note will be the fourth-string E, followed by the third-fret C. By the way, if at this point you find that it feels less natural to play upstroke than downstroke sweeps, take the time to focus just on the former before moving on.

The next few exercises are built around augmented triad (1 3 #5) shapes and require three-note sweeps. Try an assortment of patterns—first downstrokes on strings 6–4 (**Example 7a**) and upstrokes on 5–3 (**Example 7b**), and then upstrokes and downstrokes (**Example 7c**). Incidentally, these patterns, which move up in whole steps, are based on the whole tone scale. (For more on that scale, see my Weekly Workout in the December 2017 issue.) Close out the week by exploring these patterns on other string sets, and in all of these exercises, make

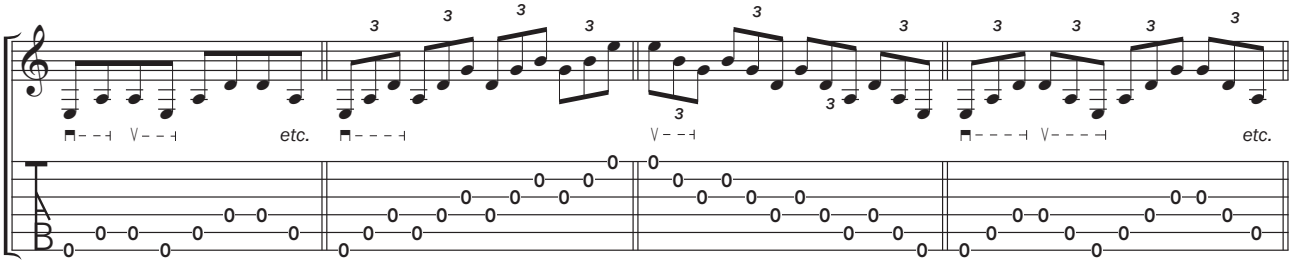
WEEK 1

Example 1



Example 2

Example 3



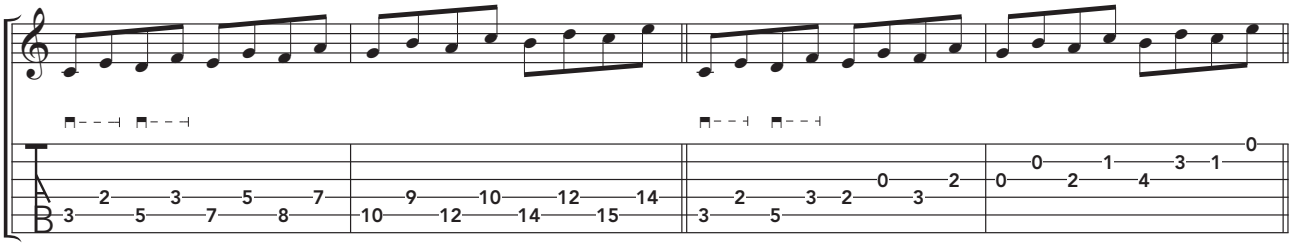
Example 4a

Example 4b

Example 4c

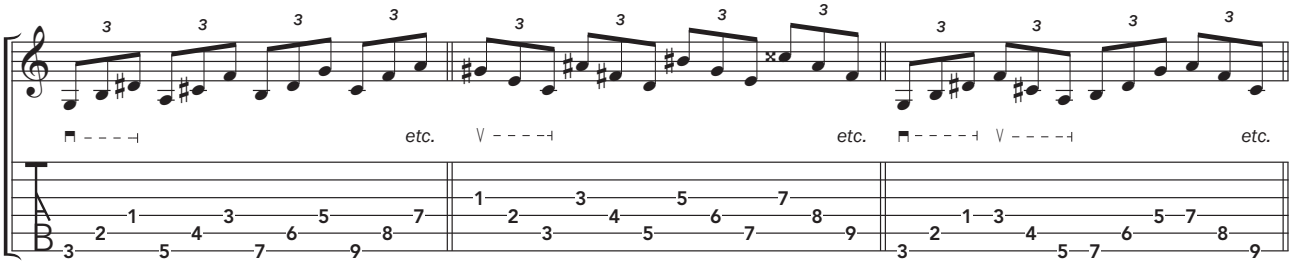
WEEK 2

Example 5



Example 6

Example 7a



Example 7b

Example 7c

sure that you are hearing all of the notes clearly and playing them in time.

WEEK THREE

This week's exercises kick things up a notch with sweeps between different fretted notes on four adjacent strings. An excellent workout for both hands, especially in terms of coordination, **Example 8** travels across the fretboard at frets 5–8. This is a formidable exercise, so don't feel bad if it takes a while to master it such that it is fully ingrained in your muscle memory. Try transferring the patterns in Ex. 8 to other positions as well—for instance, move everything up one fret at a time until you can't go any higher on your fretboard. Lastly, for a prettier sound, **Examples 9a–9c** are based on major-seventh (1 3 5 7) shapes in various sweeping configurations.

WEEK FOUR

This week's exercise (**Example 10**) ties everything together with some sweep picking over a jazz chord progression. In reality, sweep picking is most often used in conjunction with alternate picking (down-up, down-up, etc.), and this figure uses both approaches. I've indicated all of the sweeps, and you can use whatever pick strokes feel most natural for the other notes. Note that most of the sweeps are arpeggios, as is typical with this technique. In bar 1, for instance, the notes A, C, and E outline the top four notes of an Fmaj7 chord (F A C E); starting on the "and" of beat one, bar 2, a Gm7 (G B♭ D F) is played from highest note to lowest, and so on.

Ex. 10 can be challenging for both hands, so make sure to practice it very slowly at first, one measure or phrase at a time. If the notes in the sweep picks sound blurry or indistinct, try releasing fretting pressure on each note just as you pick it; that should help with crispness and definition. As with the previous figures, practice this one until you can play it at a fairly quick tempo.

Once you've successfully completed this lesson, try incorporating sweep picking whenever it feels natural or appropriate, regardless of your preferred style. Any time you are playing fretted notes on adjacent string is a good opportunity to use this technique. But as you hone you sweep-picking skills and develop blazing speed, remember to always use these tools musically and not just for flash.

Ron Jackson is a New York–based master jazz guitarist, composer, arranger, producer, and educator who's played with Taj Mahal, Jimmy McGriff, Randy Weston, Ron Carter, and others. ronjacksonmusic.com

Beginners' Tip #3

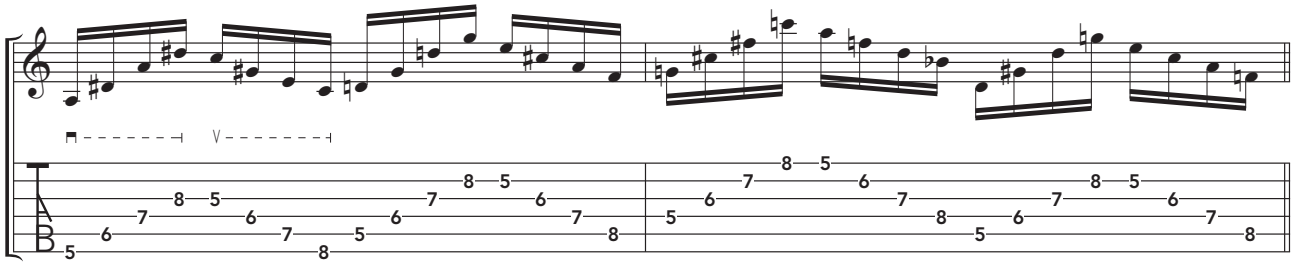
Whenever possible, remember to make sure that your fretting fingers are pre-positioned on the strings that you will be sweep picking.

Beginners' Tip #4

If you use roundwounds, sweep perpendicular to the strings. This will prevent an undesirable scratching sound when sweep picking.

WEEK 3

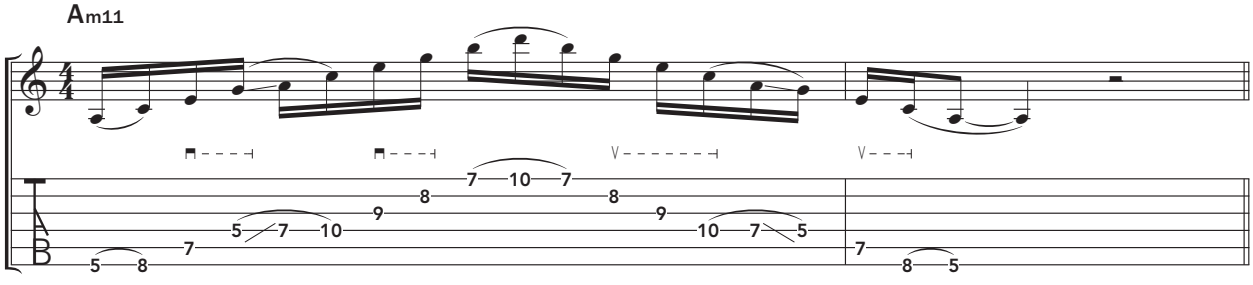
Example 8

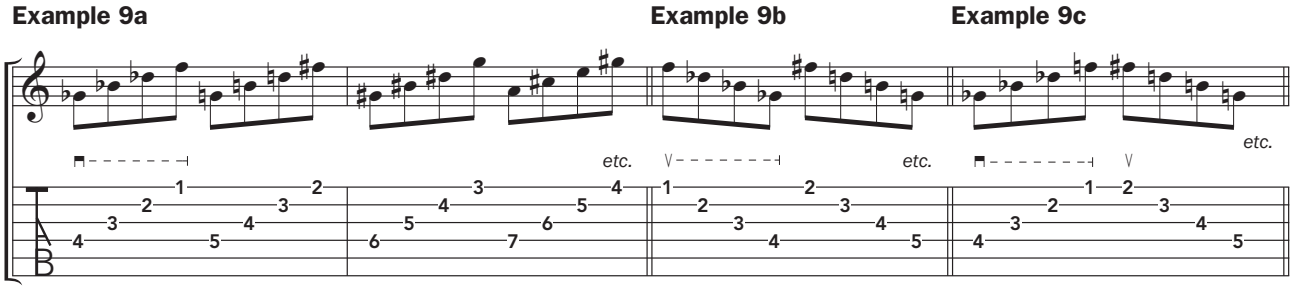


TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Here's a two-octave arpeggio, combining sweep picking with hammer-ons, pull-offs, and slides, that you can play over an Am7-type chord. In the higher octave, on string 1, it includes the ninth (B) and 11th (D). Once you've learned the Amaj7 arpeggio, try transforming it into other chord types—for example, raise the notes C, G, and D a half step for use over an Fmaj7 chord.

Am11




Example 9a
Example 9b
Example 9c
etc.
etc.
etc.

WEEK 4


Example 10
Fmaj7
Dm7
Gm7
G♯dim7
Am7
D7♭9
Gm7
C13
Cm9
E♭m9
B♭maj7
Gm7
C7alt
Fmaj9
E♭maj9
D♭maj9
G♭
F

BEN HARPER DECONSTRUCTS HIS SOLO ON "BETTER WAY"
acousticguitar.com/tag/january-february-2021



MATHIEU BITTON

Better Way

Ben Harper's optimistic 2006 anthem

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

Released as the first single from Ben Harper's album *Both Sides of the Gun,* "Better Way" topped the AAA charts in 2006, but the song's call to stand up for your rights and ideals continues to reverberate. The (Dixie) Chicks have covered "Better Way" as a rocking show finale, as heard on the live album/video *DCX MMXVI*, and the song remains a mainstay of Harper's live repertoire.

The original album track is built on a hypnotic drum/percussion and bass groove with a strong Indian flavor, thanks especially to the prominent drone of a tamboura (credited to David Lindley). Harper's family music store, the Folk Music Center, and its selection of instruments from around the world figure prominently in the official music video (see story on p. 18). The track's main guitar presence is a propulsive Weissenborn solo that Harper demonstrates in an exclusive video on the *Acoustic Guitar* website. In the Chicks' cover, Emily Strayer plays her own take on Harper's solo on electric lap steel.

Harper has also performed "Better Way" solo with acoustic guitar, in the key of E, and this arrangement is based on that version. If you'd like to play along with the original track, in F, capo at the first fret.

"Better Way" follows the simple classic rock progression E–D–A or I–♭VII–IV (as in Van Morrison's "Gloria" and tons of other songs), and any straight-ahead rock strumming pattern in 4/4 will work. The first measure of tab shows Harper's main rhythm pattern, with a downstrum on beat one and a percussive scratch on beat two (indicated with Xs). Maintain a continuous down/up motion with your picking hand on the eighth notes even when you are not striking the strings (for instance, you skip over beat one-*and* as well as beat three).

Measures 2 and 3 show a short intro inspired by what Harper has played live. In measure 2, fret the G note on the sixth string with your fourth finger, and give it a slight pull for a bluesy bend, while still holding the E shape. Then add the blues riff up the neck with an E7 shape on the high strings, move that shape down a fret, and add a quick slide on the second string.

As a bonus, we've notated Harper's lap-slide solo from the original recording, played in E5 tuning raised a half step: F C F F C F. In that tuning, strings 6, 2, and 1 are up a half step; strings 5 and 4 are up one and a half steps; and string 3 is lowered a step. Lighter gauge strings would be advisable for tuning up that much. A simpler and safer method would be to tune to E B E E B E and capo at the first fret, or even to D A D D A D and capo at the third fret. For the D tuning, leave strings 5 and 4 at their standard pitches; tune strings 6, 2, and 1 down a step; and drop string 3 until it's in unison with string 4.

While Harper plays this solo lap-style, you could try it in standard bottleneck style. In the solo, play double-stop riffs and occasional power chords on the upper strings, interspersing open strings throughout for the drone of the I chord. Add plenty of vibrato on the slide notes, and touch the strings with your free fretting fingers behind the slide (for instance, your index and middle fingers if you've got the slide on your ring finger) to reduce string noise. AG

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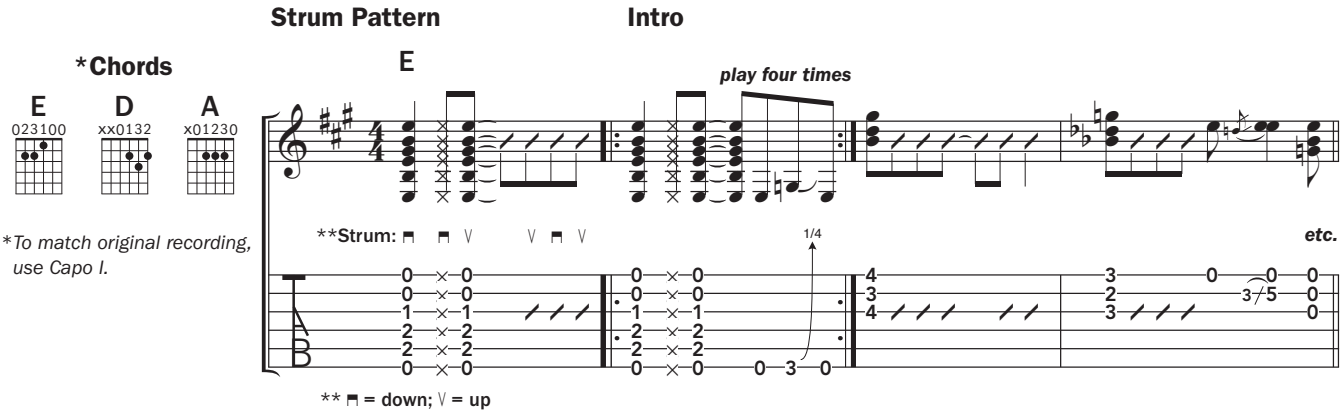


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BETTER WAY

WORDS AND MUSIC BY BEN HARPER



E
1. I'm a living sunset

Lightning in my bones

Push me to the edge

But my will is set in stone

D A E
I believe in a better way

E
2. Fools will be fools

And wise will be wise

But I will look this world

Straight in the eyes

D A E
I believe in a better way

D A E
I believe in a better way

E
3. What good is a man

Who won't take a stand

What good is a cynic

With no better plan

D A E
I believe in a better way

D A E
I believe in a better way

Guitar Solo (12 bars)

Bridge

E
Hope these words feel pleasant

As they rest upon your ears

Hope these words feel pleasant

As they rest upon your ears

Upon your ears, upon your ears

Upon your ears, upon your ears

Interlude (4 bars)

4. Reality is sharp

It cuts at me like a knife

Everyone I know

Is in the fight of their life

D A E
I believe in a better way

E
5. Take your face out of your hands

And clear your eyes

You have a right to your dreams

And don't be denied

D A E
I believe in a better way

D A E
I believe in a better way

D A E
I believe in a better way

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Guitar Solo
Tuning: F C F F C F



VIDEO LESSON
acousticguitar.com/tag/january-february-2021

Cam Ye O'er Frae France

A dropped-D arrangement of an irreverent Scottish song

BY DANNY CARNAHAN



Danny Carnahan

The Scots are second to none in their willingness and ability to mock the gentry in song lyrics. This song dates from the time of the Jacobite Rebellion in the 18th century, when the German King George came over and founded the House of Hanover.

A word about the cast of characters seems in order. Geordie Whelps is, of course, the widely reviled King George. Goosie refers to his mistress, Melusine von der Schulenburg. And Bobbing John is John Erskine, Earl of Mar, who recruited the Highland soldiers. A bright, cynical, irreverent war ditty—why am I reminded of Country Joe and the Fish?

The first really popular version of this song I heard was by Steeleye Span in 1973, though everyone from Ewan MacColl to Dick Gaughan has performed it. I've customized the sung melody a bit, as my vocal range has shrunk. Often, the word Hoosie in bar 15 starts on a high G and if you can hit that, give it a try. You can sing it either way or customize it further—remember, this is the oral tradition. The guitar setting is spare; the time signature a stately, martial 3/4. And since the verse ends on the V chord (B5), you're free to find a suitable musical dismount, other than a studio fade.

This arrangement is excerpted from Danny Carnahan's Scottish Songs for Guitar, *available at store.acousticguitar.com.*

Tuning: D A D G B E



This arrangement copyright © 2018 String Letter Publishing.

CAM YE O'ER FRAE FRANCE

TRADITIONAL



2. Geordie he's a man there is little doubt o't
He's done a' he can, wha can do without it?
Down there came a blade linkin' like my lordie
He wad drive a trade at the loom o' Geordie

3. Though the claith were bad, blythly may we niffer
Gin we get a wab, it makes little differ
We hae tint our plaid, bannet, belt, and swordie
Ha's and mailins braid but we hae a Geordie

4. Jocky's gane to France and Montgomery's lady
There they'll learn to dance Madam are ye ready?
They'll be back belyve, belted, brisk, and lordly
Brawly may they thrive to dance a jig wi' Geordie!

5. Hey for Sandy Don hey for Cockolorum
Hey for Bobbing John and his Highland Quorum
Mony a sword and lance swings at Highland hurdie
How they'll skip and dance o'er the bum o' Geordie

VIDEO LESSON
acousticguitar.com/tag/january-february-2021

Alan Barnosky



KENDALL BAILEY PHOTOGRAPHY

Home Sweet Home

A flatpicking workout inspired by a classic Earl Scruggs banjo arrangement

BY ALAN BARNOSKY

Earl Scruggs single-handedly popularized the sound of the banjo as we know it. Scruggs amazed listeners when he first performed at the Grand Ole Opry in 1945, and to this day his playing is studied and emulated by many. One of Scruggs' most influential recordings is his 1961 *Foggy Mountain Banjo*, an instrumental album. This brief 25-minute collection, with "Home Sweet Home" as the second track, is an acoustic masterpiece. The song selections are perfect, the sound quality has that classic '60s warmth, and you can hear every nuance of Scruggs' playing in microscopic detail. With few instructional banjo resources available at the time of the record's release, it became the means for aspiring players to learn the banjoist's approach.

At its core, the Scruggs style consists of a variety of fingerpicking patterns (or rolls, in banjo lingo) that are combined to produce a constant string of 16th notes while highlighting key melody notes. There are a handful of rolls Scruggs used, and one of them, called the backward roll, is featured prominently in "Home Sweet Home." Many banjo arrangements don't transfer that well to guitar because of the banjo's tuning and the use of rolls. However, there are some surprising instances where we can learn a little bit more about the guitar through studying Scruggs' banjo, and "Home Sweet Home" is a great example.

My steel-string guitar arrangement approximates Scruggs' version with a mix of open strings, the liberal use of a high G (string 1, fret 3) note to mimic the banjo's open-G, and crosspicking to simulate the banjo rolls. Crosspicking means playing three or more strings in succession, and this technique can be done forward (for instance, across the G, B, and high E strings) or backward (across the high E, B, and G strings). Since Scruggs would mix various rolls together to highlight the melody, this arrangement similarly incorporates backward and forward crosspicking, as well as lines that are not crosspicked at all.

If you are new to crosspicking, I recommend checking out "Crosspicking 101," a lesson with Molly Tuttle that originally appeared in *AG*'s April 2017 issue. As you begin to get more familiar with the technique, work through this version of "Home Sweet Home" and identify where the forward and backward crosspicking sections are. I prefer strict alternate picking throughout this arrangement, even for the crosspicking sections, and the pick direction markings in the notation illustrate how that works. Alternate picking can feel unintuitive in some spots (like in bar 11), but over time will become natural and help create a rhythmic pulse that drives the tune.

As for the fretting hand, much of this arrangement uses familiar triad chord shapes, but some spots have tricker shapes (like the stretch in bar 10) or unusual fingerings (as in the end of bar 3). See my fingering suggestions in the notation to help get through these spots.

There are other guitar arrangements of "Home Sweet Home" out there, and I recommend checking those out to see how a single tune can be interpreted in a multitude of ways. Remember, though, that this version closely aligns with Scruggs', works up and down the neck, and incorporates both forward and backward crosspicking. The result is a challenging and fun version of the tune that also serves as an excellent picking exercise. AG

HOME SWEET HOME

MUSIC BY HENRY BISHOP



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John Henry

A four-chord tribute to an American folk hero

BY KATE KOENIG



Maurice Tani

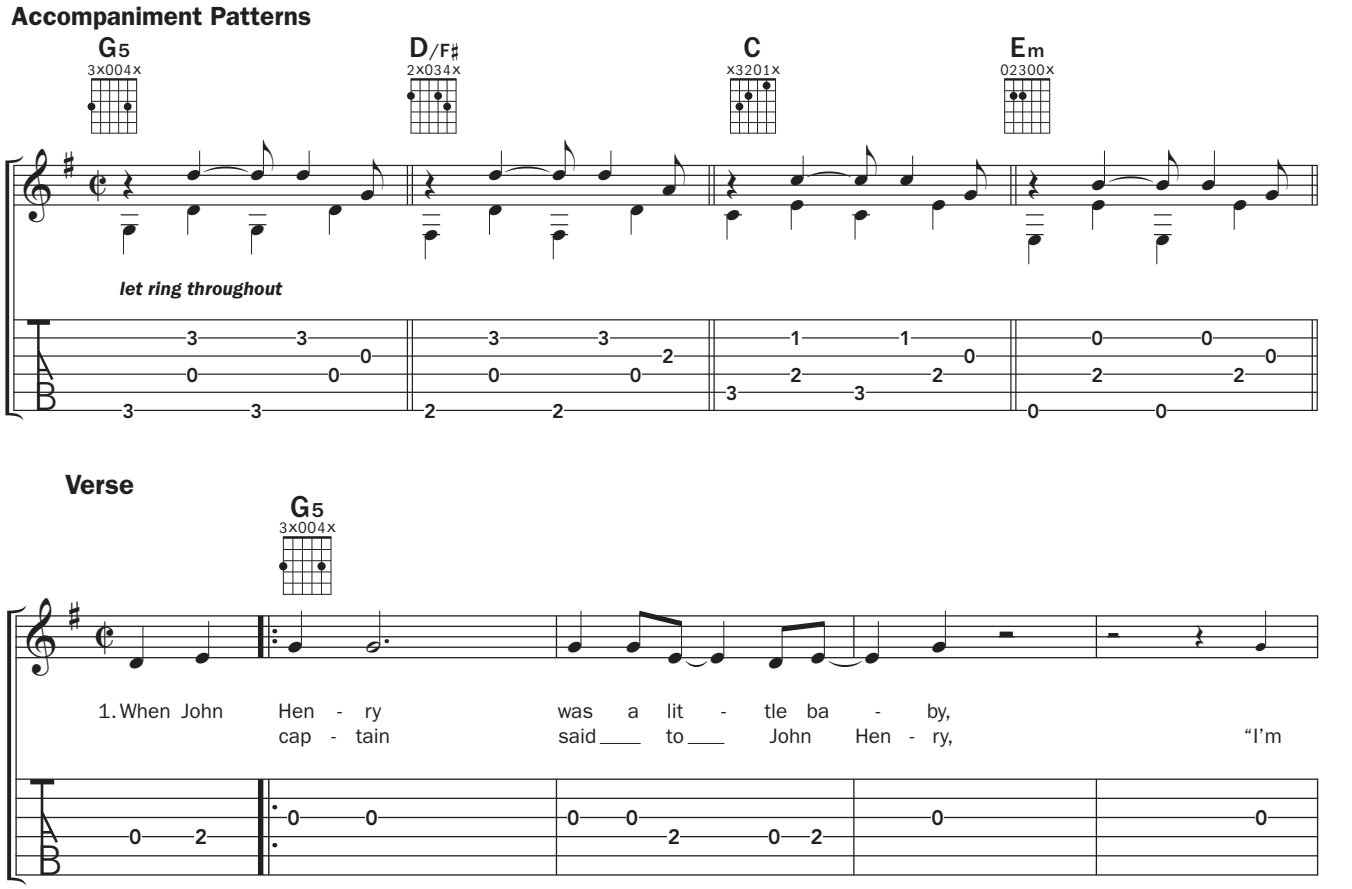
Passed down from the late 1800s, the folk ballad "John Henry" tells the story of a Black steel driver who dies in an effort to best a steam drill in laying down steel for the construction of a railroad. Henry is thought to have been a real person, whose proof of existence has been pieced together by a combination of oral history and railroad company records. As the tale goes, Henry's claim to heroism was his ultimate victory over the steam drill.

Not only has "John Henry" been covered by countless artists, including Johnny Cash, Big Bill Broonzy, Bruce Springsteen, Harry Belafonte, and Gillian Welch, its story has been referenced throughout film and television since the early 20th century, most notably in the stop-motion animation film *John Henry and the Inky-Poo* (1946).

This arrangement features just four chords: G5, D/F♯, Em, and C. The G5 is played similarly to a regular open G chord, but includes a D on the third fret of the second string, excluding the major third, B. For the D/F♯, you can play the F♯ with your second finger (as singer-songwriter Maurice Tani does in the accompanying video), your first finger, or you can wrap your thumb around the neck to reach it.

Tani plays the piece with a basic Travis-picking pattern. (For a primer on this approach, see the Basics lesson in the December 2017 issue.) The lower voice, picked by the thumb on the bottom string, maintains a steady quarter-note pulse; the higher voice, played on the top three strings, complements the structure set by the thumb. If Travis picking is new to you, try playing it very slowly at first, making note of where the high voice matches the beat of the lower one and when it falls in between. Gradually pick up the tempo until you can play it up to speed comfortably for the best performance of this homage to a folk hero. AG

JOHN HENRY — TRADITIONAL




D/F♯
2x034x
5
sit - tin' on his dad - dy's knee, he
gon - na bring that steel drill a - round. I'm
G5
3x004x
C
x3201x
9
picked up a ham - mer and a piece of steel and cried, "This
gon - na bring that steel drill out on these tracks. I'm gon - na
G5
3x004x
D/F♯
2x034x
Em
02300x
C
x3201x
13
ham - mer's gon - na be the death of me, Lord, Lord. This
lay that steel on down, Lord, Lord. I'm gon - na
*Maurice Tani sings the C an octave below.
G5
3x004x
D/F♯
2x034x
G5
3x004x
1.–10.
17
ham - mer's gon - na be the death of me.
lay that steel on down.
2. Now the
3. Well, John

Cont. on p. 58

Cont. from p. 57



Maurice Tani sings the C an octave below.

3. Well John Henry told his captain,
"Lord, a man ain't nothin' but a man
But before I let that steam drill beat me
I'll die with a hammer in my hand, Lord, Lord
I'll die with a hammer in my hand"

4. Well John Henry drivin' on the right side
That steam drill drivin' on the left
He said, "Before I let your steam drill beat me
I'll hammer myself to death, Lord, Lord
I'll hammer my fool self to death"

5. Well John Henry said to his shaker,
"Shaker, why don't you sing?
'Cause I'm swingin' 30 pounds from my hips on down
Yeah listenin' to my cold steel ring, Lord, Lord
Listenin' to my cold steel ring"

6. Well the captain, he said to John Henry
"What is that storm I hear?"
John Henry said, "That ain't no storm, captain
That's just my hammer in the air, Lord, Lord
That's just my hammer in the air"

7. John Henry hammered in the mountains
His hammer was strikin' fire
But he worked so hard it broke his heart
John Henry laid down his hammer and he died, Lord, Lord
He laid down his hammer and he died

8. Well now John Henry, he had him a woman
By the name of Polly Ann
She walked out to those tracks, picked up John Henry's hammer
Polly drove steel like a man, Lord, Lord
She drove steel like a man

9. Well the captain called for a measure
So they brought out a tape so fine
Human hands laid down 12 feet of hard track
And that steam drill laid just nine, Lord, Lord
That steam drill laid just nine

10. They took John Henry to the graveyard
They laid him in the sand
Every locomotive car a-rollin' on by
Hollered, "There lies a steel-drivin' man, Lord, Lord
There lies a steel drivin' man"

11. Now every Monday mornin'
When the bluebird begins to sing
You can hear John Henry from a mile or more,
You can hear John Henry's hammer ring, Lord, Lord
You can hear John Henry's hammer ring

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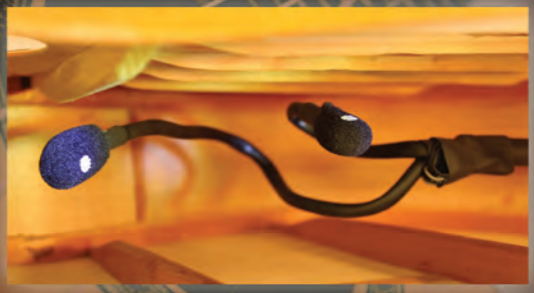
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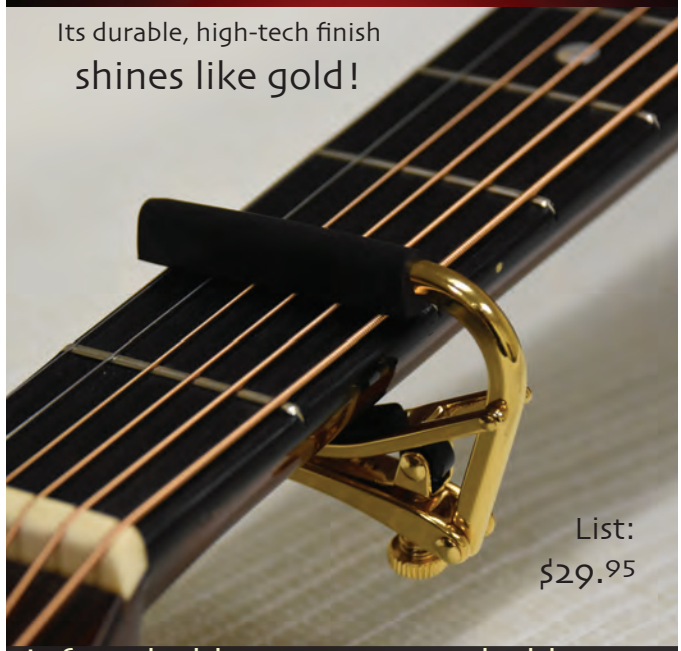
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Davis Street Rag

Try this easy introduction to the sophisticated art of ragtime guitar

BY MARY FLOWER

Mary Flower



COURTESY OF MARY FLOWER

Ragtime music played on the guitar is musically complex and is a hefty challenge for fingerpickers. Since the late 19th century, guitarists have been imitating this African American art form made famous by pianists like Jelly Roll Morton and Scott Joplin. Enthusiasts today are still mesmerized by the jaw-dropping technique of guitarist Blind Blake, who in the 1920s was one of the most accomplished and inimitable practitioners of ragtime guitar. It would take a lifetime of study to accurately replicate his music, so let's take some baby steps!

Ragtime tends to have lots of syncopation—that is, an emphasis on beats that aren't normally accented. The syncopation usually doesn't fall in the same place in each measure. For a gentle introduction to ragtime, I composed a simple G-major instrumental, "Davis Street Rag," in which the syncopation always occurs in a predictable place, the "and" of beat three. After mastering this tune, you might be ready to begin to study the likes of Mississippi John Hurt, whose "Spike Driver Blues," a one-chord wonder also in the key of G, uses similar phrases.

THE BASICS

Let's start by taking in the tune's roadmap and chord structure. This 16-bar piece includes the basic I (G), IV (C), V (D/F♯), and vi (Em) chords, as well as a somewhat less common choice, the III (B7), and some diminished action (Edim7 and Gdim7). Play through the chords with any 4/4 fingerpicking or strumming pattern to get a feel for how things move.

Next, take a look at the alternating-bass pattern, shown in the down-stemmed notes on strings 4–6, that occurs in most measures. Get familiar with the correct bass notes for each chord. As in many other guitar styles, the role of the thumb in ragtime is to be rock-solid and reliable as it holds down the four beats of each measure. When you're comfortable with the feel, try slightly muting the bass notes with the heel of your picking hand. This not only adds a percussive sound but makes the melody jump out. Players ranging from Merle Travis to Lightnin' Hopkins muted the bass strings for this desirable effect.

The piece requires minimal effort from the fretting hand. For instance, you can form each G or Em chord using only one finger. For the D/F♯ chord, I like to wrap my thumb around the neck to fret the low F♯, but you could use your second finger instead. The only chords that require four fingers are the diminished voicings in bar 12, but the good news is that Edim7 and Gdim7 are played with the same shape.

THOSE RAGGED NOTES

Now look through the notation for the syncopations as described above. The notes in these measures will be counted "one, two, three-and, four." This is the characteristic part of the ragtime sound. Don't let the syncopations disrupt the consistency of your thumb. I suggest tapping your foot along with each bass note, and also using a metronome.

Notice how the syncopations always land on the sixth-string G and the third-string B♭—two notes whose dissonance gives this music its punch. Pinch them together and you will hear an undeniable train wreck. If you fret the G bass note with your third finger, then the only finger available for the B♭ is your fourth finger. You might find this finger unreliable, but remember—the more you use it, the stronger it will become.

THE TURNAROUNDS

Aside from the melody, there are two descending turnarounds, or harmonized bass runs. For the first turnaround, in measure 8, hold the C chord while pinching the open strings 1 and 3. On beat three, come out of position to play the dyad on strings 4 and 2 with your third and fourth fingers, respectively, then return to the C shape (fingers 1 and 2 on strings 2 and 4), omitting the root note (C) on string 5.

The second turnaround, which occurs in measure 15, requires a wee bit more effort. After you play the G chord on beat one, switch to strings 2 and 5; fret them at the second and third frets, respectively, and move that shape down by half steps. Try this a few times until your fingers get the hang of it.

As when learning any new tune, play "Davis Street Rag" slowly and carefully before bringing it up to tempo. After you've gained confidence, feel free to write some lyrics. Teach it to your song circle and have them play in different shapes with a capo. Create your own bridge or chorus. But most important, remember to have fun with this accessible ragtime piece. AG



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Joshia de Jonge



DAVID IRVINE

MAKERS & SHAKERS

A Family Affair

Joshia de Jonge on learning lutherie from her father and more

BY EMILE MENASCHÉ

Joshia de Jonge has never known a world without the sights, smells, and sounds of guitars in the making. As the daughter of noted Canadian luthier Sergei de Jonge, the shop floor was literally the playground of her earliest memories; sawdust was her sandbox. "My dad was a guitar maker before I was born," says de Jonge, via Zoom from her home in Québec. "As a little kid, I used to go to work with him and hang out on the floor playing—basically like driving cars in the sawdust or sanding blocks of wood."

Playtime in her father's workshop would eventually start de Jonge on the path to becoming a world-class classical guitar maker in her own right. She began her first instrument in middle school as something to do with her brothers after classes. Before she turned 20, she was good enough to earn a standing ovation for the guitar she presented to the judges at the 1998 Guild of American Luthiers Convention. But early recognition didn't make her complacent, and being in the family business didn't mean staying put. And her approach to guitar making has never stopped evolving.

While she calls her father her biggest influence, de Jonge also draws on her travels and the tutelage of other master builders. Today, she's renowned for combining traditional methods with modern techniques like sandwich tops, lattice bracing, and neck twists. Perhaps the most important lessons de Jonge, now in her early 40s, learned growing up were less about specific building techniques than about a thirst for new ideas and the courage to try them out. "I experiment," she says. "I'm pretty lucky to have a father who's done a lot of experimenting."

After years working alongside her father, de Jonge now experiments in her own shop, which she built four years ago in the Gatineau Hills of western Québec, with her husband, luthier Patrick Hodgins—the ideal venue to talk about her journey from playing in sawdust to making world-class instruments.

As the daughter of a noted luthier, when did you first become aware of the guitar?

I don't really remember. My father used to play when I was little, so I can't remember not being aware of the guitar as an instrument. When I was around age six, he got commissioned to make a guitar and the client wanted it decorated with a child's art. So I got to paint the guitar—

just draw on it. But I think it was around like grade 6 or grade 7 that I started realizing he was a guitar maker, and that not everyone's parents did that sort of thing for a living. That's when it started to interest me. I started to think it was cool that he did that—which I guess is when I started building as well.

Did you play before you built?
No—I mean I play very, very little. I took lessons here and there when I was younger, but it was really the building that interested me more. I love classical guitar and I love listening. I do play enough to try each guitar. But it's really the building and design that's been more my personal focus and passion.

Did your father actively suggest you start making guitars?
It actually started when my younger brother, Sagen, who was eight at the time, was playing around in the shop; I think my dad was away for the day. He'd drawn up this small guitar that he and my dad turned into an instrument. It's kind of a ukulele-size four-string, which my brother gave to me that year. Anyway, after Sagen started building one, I was like, "Wait a minute, I want to do this as well!" He was 11 and I was 13, and we both started building our first guitars side by side.

How seriously did you take it?
It was very much a hobby—some weekends, sometimes after school, basically whenever we were bored. We didn't have a TV growing up. It was just a fun thing to go do. For me, that first guitar took three years. I was 16 when it was finished. But once I finished the first, I guess I got the bug for it. I wanted to keep building. The next one was more serious, like, "I'm actually doing this." I was still in school, so building was not full time—although I managed to get a co-op program going in my high school, so I was able to go work in the shop every other afternoon. That was kinda cool.

Do you still have that first guitar?
Yes, I do. It's a funny little guitar, an alto. For some reason, I guess because we were kids, my dad figured we should build smaller guitars. He'd also been making instruments for a guitar orchestra in Japan at the time and had been building a fair number of alto guitars.

When did you start to realize you wanted to build guitars for a living?
Probably in my late teens or early 20s. I was building guitars and going to festivals. I started getting more serious about it and realized I really liked it. I was just going to keep doing it until something else came along that interested me. I still wasn't sure it was going to be my career, but I was pretty into it by then.

Did you study with luthiers other than your father when you were starting out?
A little bit. When I was 17, I went to British Columbia and worked in Jean Larrivée's workshop for a couple of months. It was a small factory at the time—around 50 people. I was doing inlay there. At that point I was building both steel-string and classical instruments and wasn't sure where I wanted to go. And inlay really interested me.

Years later, I spent a little bit of time with [Vancouver-based luthier] Geza Burghardt, an incredible builder who makes violins and all kinds of instruments. I went to him to learn French polishing. Before that we had been using lacquer on the guitars. So I really started to get more into the traditions of classical guitar.

How do those influences come together?
My classical guitars are a modern contemporary build, but I also follow a lot of the tradition. My main influences are Geza, a little bit of Larrivée, and mostly my dad. I also did a lot of traveling to guitar festivals in my late teens and early 20s and met so many guitar makers who became inspirations—teachers in a way, but more by just my seeing their work. Also, growing up I knew Grit Laskin and Linda Manzer because they had learned from Larrivée with my dad. My dad used to work in Grit's shop when he was between shops, so I spent a lot of time there as a kid. There was inspiration there for sure, even though I don't build steel-strings.

'I try to get every detail as perfect as I can—to an OCD level.'

How did you develop your own vision of what a classical guitar should be?
My dad has taught a guitar-building course for more than 20 years now, so there were always a lot of students coming through and a lot of ideas. My dad also is an experimenter. He is always trying different bracing patterns. My world was filled with so many different guitar makers and so many different ideas and styles of building. I think that's what got me into lattice bracing and, more recently, double tops after visiting Gernot Wagner in Germany. I guess my style developed from just seeing so much of what other people were doing and then finding the things that really work for me and amalgamating that.

What is your guitar-making philosophy?
I try to get every detail as perfect as I can—to an OCD level. It's the woods, the combination of woods, the bracing patterns—it's a tricky question to answer because every single detail is important to me. I try to stress and obsess about it less now, but on every single job, I'm always trying to do my best. It can never be absolutely perfect, but I guess I'm seeing the beauty in that as well.

Are there specific techniques or materials that define your style as a builder?
My bracing pattern on the top is definitely one, although it's very much inspired by something my father designed in the late '90s. But it's kind of changed. It's hard to describe without nerding out [*laughs*]. The braces are overlapped; it's a lattice pattern and there are three basic braces and three that go on top. This might only make sense to other guitar makers . . .

Nerd on—our readers like that kind of stuff.
A lot of what I think about in building is balance, and that's what my guitars often seem to be known for. This bracing pattern [was originally] a course of three braces with another course on top. Now they're kind of woven so they're all the same height. They used to be one lower course and one course on top—and the top was not quite as uniform. This kind of woven lattice is a lot more balanced.

I also used to use a big X brace that was more rooted in steel-string ideas, and now it's got the more traditional harmonic bars. So I guess the bracing—without going too into detail—is something that has really come a long way over the years. More recently I'm adding in a double top—a sandwich top with a layer of Nomex [a lightweight honeycomb-patterned composite] in between—and putting in a *tornavoz* [a resonating cone added to the soundhole, pioneered by the legendary luthier Antonio de Torres], which I did for just the last two guitars. That's what I really like about guitar building. I'm still learning. You can always learn with it.

Any other recent changes in your approach?
The bridge. My dad has a unique style of bridge that I used to do. But I've gone to a more traditional design while still incorporating some of his styles that aren't traditional. The back bracing comes mostly from

my dad but has been changed as well. The neck twist I do [de Jonge shapes a subtle twist into the necks of her guitars to allow a more comfortable playing position] comes from Eric Sahlin. I'm doing my own version, which is an amalgamation of his and my dad's.

Describe the neck twist.
It's kind of like a helicopter blade—it really twists. But it's straight on every string, so building that can be tricky. If you take a straight edge, it rocks if you put it diagonally on the fingerboard. But if you put it along each string it's straight. It has to be, or it would buzz. The twist makes the saddle an even height. On classicals, more traditionally the bass is way up. I just like the way it looks and the way it feels to play. You can twist just the fingerboard but I do it in the neck and the fingerboard; I think it's more comfortable.

How do you construct your sandwich tops?
A lot of people are doing them and one of the popular ways is with Nomex, which is super light, but if you compress it, it's super stiff. I use a really thin layer of spruce, a layer of the Nomex, and, right now, a layer of cedar. You can do cedar-Nomex-cedar, any combination. It's tricky to do it because you need to make the layers very thin. The top layer of spruce is half a millimeter; the bottom layer of cedar is like 0.3 millimeters. Then, you use just enough glue that it will stick, stay, and be safe, but not enough to fill up all the honeycombs in the Nomex. The sandwich design makes the tops stiffer and lighter, so you get more movement and more volume. I've done only a handful of double-tops, so I'm still learning about them.


DAVID IRVINE

Do you have favorite tonewoods?
I always say that whatever I'm building with at the time is my favorite. I've lately been really into ebony for the back and sides. I use a variety of species: pale moon ebony; gaboon ebony, which is what most fingerboards are made out of; katalox, which is a Mexican ebony. I'm using a lot of the ebony woods that traditionally weren't used as much on guitars because they're prone to checking and developing cracks. But I've been laminating my backs and sides with Spanish cedar and am basically safe from that happening. I really like Spanish cedar on the inside because it gives off a lovely smell, and I also like the sound better. I also love the rosewoods, ziricote, maple, wenge—I mean there are so many.

What about for tops?
I like European spruce, Canadian Engelmann spruce, and western cedar. That's not to say redwood and other woods wouldn't work well for tops as well.

How do you arrive at your wood preferences—or do you get specific requests from players?
I'm not one to take big chances, but when I see a wood that inspires me, I experiment. For example, when I saw pale moon ebony for the first time a few years ago, I fell in love with that.

I have wood dealers I've known for a long time. My father has an extensive collection of wood, and I have a bit of a collection as well.

As for commissions: Most people do have a wood in mind that they'd like to use. I say my favorite is what I'm working on at the time because so many woods are so beautiful. You can make most woods beautiful the way you work with them. I like the natural finishes and tend to stay away from coloring the woods, though that can be beautiful.

You said you were influenced by your father's students. Now that you have your own shop, are you planning to teach as well?
I assisted my dad for years when we had the course at his shop, but my husband, Patrick, and I had just decided to start offering courses. We were supposed to have one going right now but with COVID we couldn't do it.

What's on the horizon?
I'm really excited about starting to teach and getting the shop set up. I've had my own shop for four years, and before that I worked in my father's shop, which is about 20 minutes away. I have orders for the next few years, and I'm excited about all those guitars. Also, I build one guitar a year for guitar festivals, and that project is already really exciting because I can do whatever I want. I usually spend about a year thinking about it. It's a chance to experiment and try things I've never done before. **AG**





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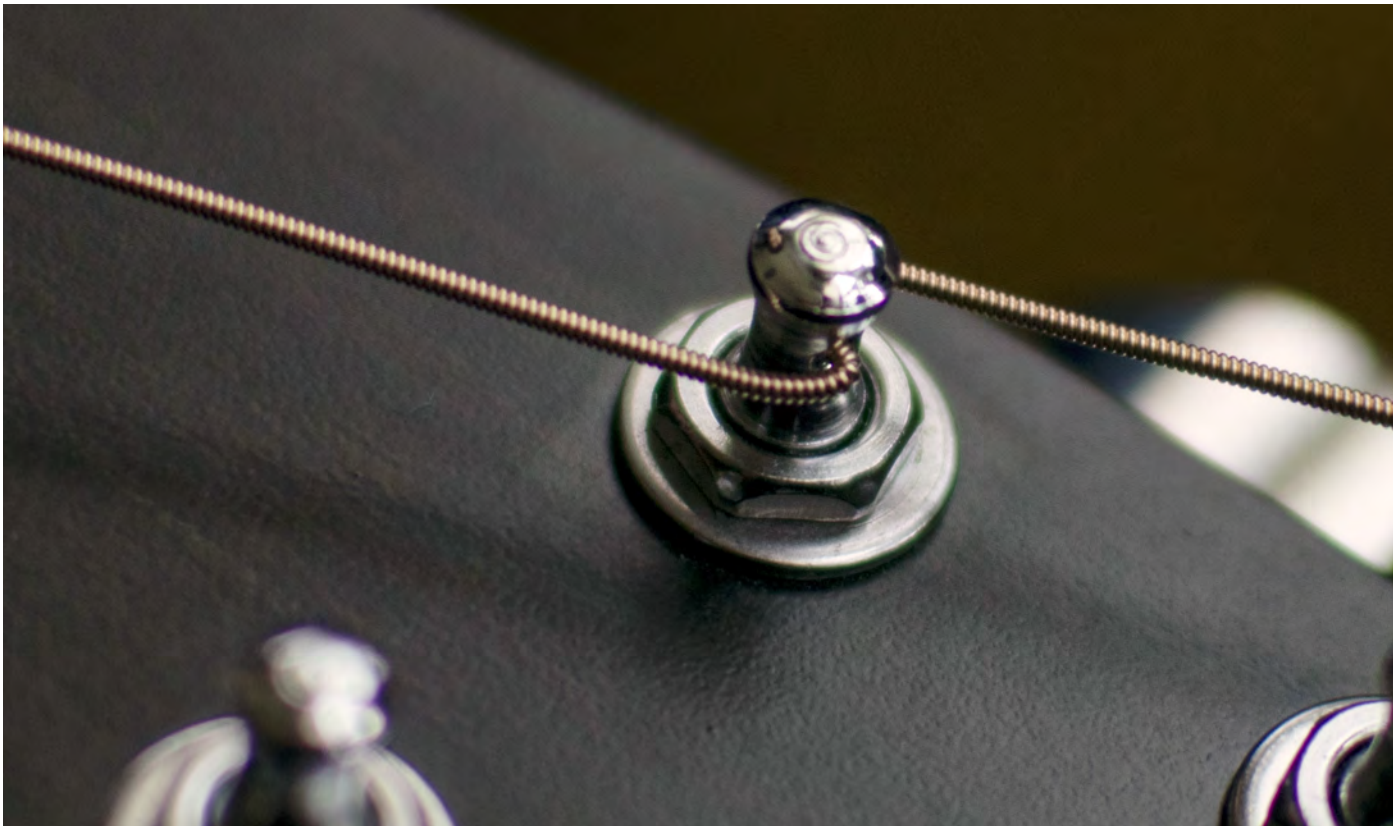
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Change It Up

Try this simple but effective approach to restring any guitar with ease

BY MARTIN KEITH

No matter how varied and unique each of us may be, from our tone and touch to our gear preferences, all guitarists have one thing in common: we eventually need to change our strings. In my life as a guitar maker and repair tech, I've encountered every conceivable approach to stringing—from the merely ineffective to the truly insane. I've pricked my fingers on enough razor-sharp, rusty string ends to warrant dozens of tetanus shots, and I've frequently spent more time getting the remnants of old strings off the instrument than it has taken to put a whole set of new ones on.

A surprising number of my clients, many of whom have played for decades, are still reluctant to change their strings themselves, often for fear that they might do something wrong that could damage their instrument. In hopes of making this process easier and more fun, this article will present some basic information about restringing, as well as a few helpful tips that I've learned the hard way.

1 DETERMINE WHEN TO CHANGE STRINGS

Beginning guitarists often ask me how often strings should be changed, and there really is no right answer. Many factors determine the useful life of a string, including the player's style, frequency of use, and sweat chemistry. I've known some guitarists with acidic sweat who could kill a set of strings in about 30 minutes, while others could leave a set on for months without needing to change them.

As a rule of thumb in my shop, I will change strings if they have any visible grime or gunk accumulated on them (usually most visible on the underside of the string, facing the fretboard), or if the wound strings have any dents or wear spots over the frets. Some players crave the bright, vibrant response of a fresh pack, while others prefer the broken-in warmth and balance of an older set. Learning to find the sweet spot of a given set's useful life is a big part of identifying the best set for your needs.

2 LOOK OUT FOR COMMON PITFALLS

A frequent and easy mistake is to accidentally lose parts during restringing. It's quite common for many parts on the guitar to be held in place by string tension alone—the bridge pins, saddle, nut, and tuner bushings (the small metal sleeves around the tuner posts) are often loose on older guitars, and can simply fall off the guitar when the strings are removed. These tiny parts can be maddeningly hard to find underneath a couch, which is why I always recommend working on a clean table.

On archtop guitars, the bridge is always held in place by tension alone, so when restringing one, be careful to take note of the bridge position so it can be placed back in the correct spot. I use a small piece of masking tape, which I de-tack by first sticking it to my shirt before putting it on the guitar top. I place one small piece on each side of the archtop bridge, with a small pencil mark aligned to the front edge. This allows me to

replace the bridge in the exact same place during restringing.

Partly to avoid losing the pins, and partly for simple convenience, I like to anchor all the strings in the bridge or tailpiece first, before winding them onto the posts. It's important to make sure that the ball ends are correctly anchored—in typical pin-style bridges, it's possible for the ball ends to dangle below the bridge plate and rattle, causing mystery buzzes. Place the string ball into its hole, and insert the pin loosely. Pull up on the string until you feel the ball seat firmly against the bridge plate (underside of the top) and then press the pin more tightly into place. In the case of tailpiece-equipped guitars, double check each string's anchor point before you bring the string up to tension, as it's easier for those ball ends to slip out during installation.

3 LEARN A FOOLPROOF APPROACH

When I was first taught to change strings, I was shown a somewhat complicated technique that involved tucking the free end of the string underneath the first turn of wrap on the tuner post, to lock it against slippage. It took me several years to get to the point where I could do it without leaving slack in the resulting loops, and it was always a challenge to remove old strings from the tuners, as they would often break at the post, leaving sharp little rings of string stuck in the holes, which had to be picked out with pliers. Not fun, to say the least.

In my first job, at Veillette Guitars, I learned a much simpler way, which remains my go-to approach. I've used this stringing technique for everything from .007 strings at very high tension all the way to giant .095 sub-bass strings, and they have always held firmly without slipping. Even if tuned up to the breaking point, the strings would always snap before the windings would slip.

The basic idea of this approach is to kink the string in opposing directions on each side of the string post. Simply insert the string through the post, leaving a small amount of slack between the nut and the bridge (about enough to stand four fingers between the stretched string and fretboard). Then, bend the string on both sides of the post simultaneously, so the string makes a Z shape through the hole. (If you are installing a bass-side string, you would bend both sides clockwise). Clip off the trailing side of the string and wind up the slack onto the tuning post. Be sure that each wrap winds below the prior ones, so the string gets closer to the headpiece as each wind is added.

If you've left the correct amount of slack, there should be two to three wraps on the heavier strings, and three to five at most on the thinner ones. Too many wraps can cause tuning problems, as it makes it more likely for the wraps to pile up on each other and not wind evenly around the post. Too few wraps will potentially make the string slip, no matter how it's wound.

Stringing with a simple Z bend takes less time than any other technique I've seen, and it has proven itself to be reliable for me over tens of thousands of strings installed. Strings are very easy to remove from the posts, and even if they break at the post, the leftover ends just fall out of the hole without any need for tools. I have uttered some choice words over the years for strings that were double-threaded through the post, knotted into place, twisted around themselves, and even dabbed with superglue to help them stay put. Whether you change your strings yourself or have it done by a tech, this simple and foolproof approach will make it much more reliable and fun. AG



Solid headstock and banjo tuners on a custom-ordered 1842 Martin guitar



COURTESY OF GEORGE GRUHN

Evolving Markets

The fascinating history behind solid headstocks and banjo tuners on guitars

BY GEORGE GRUHN

Q: *Having seen the 1930 Martin 000-45 Deluxe in the September/October 2020 issue, I'm curious about a few things: Why and when did Martin switch to a solid headstock, and was Martin the first to use this design? What was the deal with the banjo tuners on the earliest OMs, and were any other makers using them? —Melody M., via email*

A: It is often said that early Martin guitars with 12-fret necks typically have slotted pegheads similar to classical guitars, while those with 14-fret necks only have solid pegheads. But this does not, in fact, correspond to the reality of Martin history.

Christian Frederick Martin, Sr. and his family were from Markneukirchen, a town in what is now eastern Germany, near the border of the Czech Republic. Prior to emigrating to the United States in 1833, Martin had worked for about a decade in Vienna, Austria, in the workshop of Johann Georg Stauffer, which produced high-quality instruments that were sought after by professional musicians. As is typical of the guitars of that time, most had a neck joining the body at the 12th fret.

Many of the Stauffers featured pegheads with six tuners on a side—remarkably similar in shape to Fender's electric-guitar design of 150 years later. Solid pegheads with friction pegs were standard for most guitar designs from the Renaissance through 1800, before the advent of geared tuners. The technology for producing geared tuners was very different from the skills of a luthier. A set of Stauffer-designed gears—which were also used on some of the earliest Martins made in the United States—could cost more than a mid-priced guitar with friction pegs.

From Martin's founding in 1833, the company offered Stauffer-style designs, with friction pegs on a solid headstock, or geared tuners on either a slotted headstock (three tuners per side, like on a classical guitar) or the six-on-a-side configuration.

As early as 1824, Spanish virtuoso guitarist Trinidad Huerta performed in New York, and by 1840 players such as Philip Benedid and Madame de Goñi traveled from Spain to New York and other East Coast cities, where they were very well received. New York City teacher and guitar dealer John B. Coupa was one of Martin's best customers and strongly urged the company to adopt Spanish designs. Martin's famous squared-off peghead shape and peghead volute were not unique, nor was Martin the first to utilize this design. The Spanish instruments that were influential at

that time—primarily made in and around the city of Cádiz by luthiers such as Antonio de Lorca, Jose Recio, and Joséf Pagés—utilized virtually identical shapes, which were prominently featured by the Spanish players touring the United States.

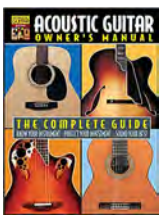
It can be said that Martin imitated the peghead and body shapes, headstock volute, and three-ring soundhole rosette of these luthiers. But Martin refined their designs, incorporating a Germanic diamond-shaped peghead graft and creating guitars with highly sophisticated workmanship, graceful designs, and X-bracing patterns as early as 1843. Their sound and playability offered a new level of sophistication, prompting de Goñi to use and endorse Martin guitars rather than the Spanish originals. [Martin briefly offered a replica of a guitar de Goñi played—the Size 1 De Goni Authentic 1843—the earliest model of its size, as well as the first to use X-bracing. —*Ed.*]

The designs introduced and refined by C.F. Martin, Sr. during the 1840s and '50s remained remarkably unchanged through the mid-1920s. Martin's original customers were primarily classical and parlor music players who used gut strings. It was not until the 1920s, when Hawaiian songs became popular, that Martin began offering instruments specifically designed for the steel strings required of this music. The transition may have been further prompted by the fact that during the 1920s, Andrés Segovia toured the United States and introduced a new style of classical-guitar playing, made possible by Spanish Torres-style instruments, which he claimed made the earlier gut-string styles of Cadiz and Martin instruments to be obsolete. Martin needed to adapt to a changing market.

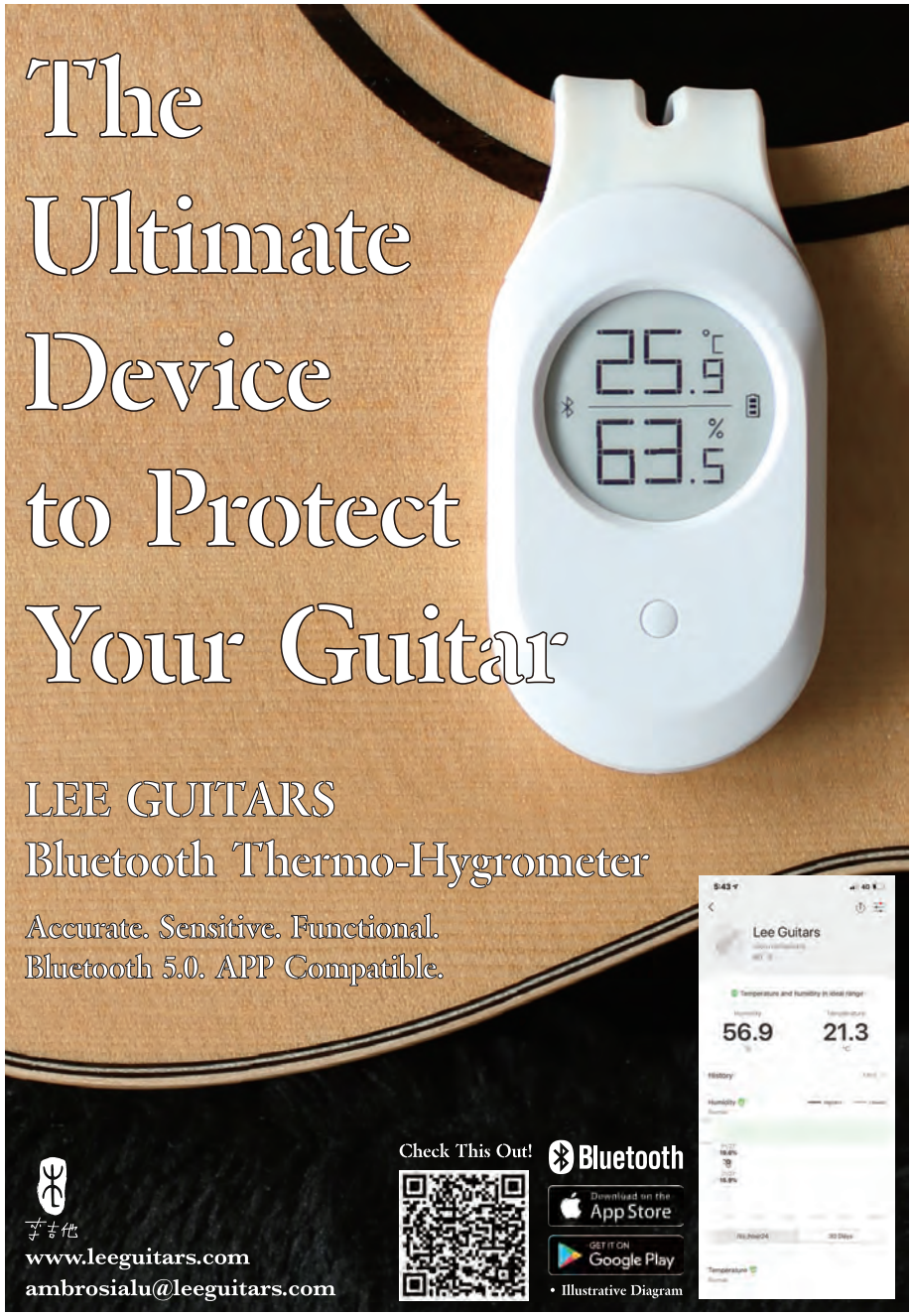
During the late 1920s, Martin slightly increased the thickness of its tops to withstand the tension of steel strings. In late 1929, Martin introduced the OM-28 Orchestra Model, the company's first six-string guitar with a 14-fret neck. The OM prototype featured a slotted peghead, quickly changed to an old-style solid peghead with geared banjo pegs. Although Martin can rightfully claim that the OM-28 was the first flattop steel-string guitar to feature a 14-fret neck, it should be noted that the Gibson L-5 archtop guitar, which debuted in 1923, featured a 14-fret neck, while Gibson's Style 0 artist model guitar, with its fancy mandolin-style body scroll, incorporated a 15-fret neck and a solid peghead as early as 1908. It should also be noted that Gibson guitars featured solid pegheads as far back as founder Orville Gibson's work in the 1890s.

Most of these instruments utilized tuners mounted three on a plate, similar to the type used on guitars with slotted headstocks, but the L-5, as well as some Gibson flattops, briefly featured the option of banjo pegs starting in 1929. The banjo pegs featured a much lower gear ratio than guitar players preferred and were ill-suited to the tension of guitar strings, so both Martin and Gibson soon discontinued utilizing banjo pegs on steel-string guitars, although the former continued to use them on OM models through mid-1931. The Grover company introduced individual guitar gears designed for steel-string guitars with solid pegheads in 1930. These gears soon became the industry standard.

George Gruhn, the founder of Gruhn Guitars in Nashville, is filling in this issue for regular expert Martin Keith.



If *AG* selects your question for publication, you'll receive a complimentary copy of *AG*'s *Acoustic Guitar Owner's Manual.*



PRS Tonare Parlor SE P20E

A pretty, punchy parlor that evokes a bygone era at a budget price

BY JAMES ROTONDI

Your acoustic guitar collection is complete, right? You've got your veteran dreadnought, your college archtop, your midlife OM, that jumbo that looks great in the living room, the Gibson Blues King from your Delta discovery days, and the 12-string you swear you're going to get really into as soon as you find time to change *all* the strings. Oh, and you even have that nifty travel guitar that accompanies you on vacations. Sometimes. Okay, that one time. Ah, sweet completion.

Not so fast, spruce warrior. What your impressive array may well be missing is the diamond in the rough known as a parlor guitar. Indeed, while it may be less widely played today, until around 1870, the compact, narrow-waisted, gently articulate parlor guitar was the only game in town, generally thought of as a woman's instrument meant to be played in parlors and salons, where it wouldn't have to compete with other instruments for volume, and where it made a proportional complement to the female voice.

While dreadnoughts and other larger guitars would eventually rule the roost, smaller-bodied guitars like OMs and OOs are increasingly bothering the guitar market again, and recent parlor models by Breedlove, Collings, Ibanez, Lowden, Taylor, and other makers have quickly become up-and-coming stars of their product lines.

Enter the PRS Tonare Parlor SE P20E acoustic-electric, and its fully acoustic sibling, the SE P20, which evoke the spirit, sound, and form factor of a classic parlor while bearing the undeniable imprint of PRS' signature aesthetics and playability. Our SE P20E arrived in a PRS soft case, and opened with a flash of deep, dark, grainy chocolate brown on the all-mahogany top, and the same groovy natural grain around the laminated mahogany back and sides. (The P20 and P20E are also



available in Charcoal and Black Top finishes, though I prefer the Vintage Natural finish, as reviewed.) The body depth is 3-15/32 inches at the neck block, and 3-7/8 inches at the tail, so the P20E will feel considerably shallower than, say, a full-sized dreadnought, which is typically 4-7/8 inches deep at the tail.

BIRDS OF PLAY

Touches of class abound on the Tonare—the lovely crème herringbone binding and rosette; the nicely flourished ebony bridge and its compensated bone saddle; and, of course, those signature PRS bird inlays on the ebony fingerboard, from the third-fret peregrine falcon to the 12th-fret Cooper's hawk to the 19th-fret hawk landing. The butterbean buttons on the vintage-style tuners are a high-flying touch, too. The wide and fat mahogany neck, a popular shape on many PRS electric models, feels satiny and balanced with a 1.69-inch bone nut and at a 24.72-inch scale length. One is unlikely to feel this as an especially small guitar, at least in terms of fretting-hand technique and overall playing posture. (Nevertheless, at just 19 inches long and 14 inches wide at the lower bout, the P20E certainly feels compact on the lap.)

Do make sure your nails are properly filed, and perhaps consider a heavier pick than you normally use when you begin to play the Tonare. This is not a guitar you go to for those zingy high-end strumming parts—where you point a C-mic at the 14th-fret neck joint—and it's no booming balladeer's acoustic ammo machine, either. Instead, the Tonare Parlor is all about articulation and finesse, though it won't mind if you give it a good smack now and again. Which is to say, this is a midrange-focused instrument, which happily reveals both its velvety, firm character with strong fingerstyle playing, and its presence and rounded punch with a flatpick over 1.00mm. What's more, because all of the body's efforts (distributed through PRS's hybrid X/classical bracing) are directed at low- to high-mids, you'll get an aggressive bite when you strike the strings with requisite force.

ELECTRIC PRINCESS

Now, all that said, with the SE P20E's onboard Fishman GT1 undersaddle piezo pickup system, the general wisdom about parlor guitars' modest volume and understated low-end goes somewhat out the window. Plugged into a Fender Acoustasonic amplifier, as well as a Fender Hot Rod Deville 4x10, the Tonare not only displayed plenty of low-end character, but that character came minus the kind of 200–500Hz frequency feedback that often drives electrified dreadnought players into the madhouse (probably in a straitjacket that features an X-bracing). With the Tonare SE P20E and Fishman GT1, I was able to turn up quite loud, finesse my top end, and accentuate lows (and manage my volume) with the easy soundhole-mounted preamp with tone and volume dials, and get that vivid parlor sound along with a nice dash of modern impact. The *woomph* effect. On a parlor. And no endlessly scanning the amp's feedback notch to identify the guilty Hertz. Over it!

Perhaps the only buzzkill on this otherwise charming and solidly built guitar is the decidedly un-vintage machine imprint on the back of the PRS headstock which reads: "Built by Cor-Tek Musical Instrument Co, LTD, China. Under exclusive license for PRS Guitars." Cor-Tek, for those unaware, is the official name of the Cort guitar company, with plants in Seoul, South Korea, China, and Indonesia. Now, clearly it would be difficult, if not impossible, to produce a similar guitar in the U.S. for the $579 street price that the SE P20E offers—though going with laminated mahogany back and sides, rather than solid wood, must also help keep the price affordable.

THE TAKEAWAY

Despite its overseas pedigree—or perhaps because of it—the SE P20E, with its sweet sonic character, instantly playable neck, and lovely aesthetics, is a fine example of how PRS's design methodology, quality control, and choice of materials translate extremely well into fine guitars, regardless of where in the world their instruments are actually made. Sure, you could spend a lot more to make sure your acoustic collection has all the key boxes ticked, but given that the PRS SE P20E is as easy on the eyes and ears as it is on your bank account, this lovely, scaled-down acoustic is well worth zooming in on. AG

SPECS

BODY Solid mahogany top with PRS hybrid X/classical bracing; laminated mahogany back and sides; ebony bridge

NECK 24.72" scale; 20 frets; solid mahogany with ebony fretboard; 11.81" radius; adjustable truss rod; 1.69" bone nut; vintage-style tuners with butterbean buttons; PRS bird inlays

OTHER Fishman GT1 preamp/undersaddle pickup system with soundhole-mounted tone and volume controls; light gauge strings (.012–.053); gig bag

MADE IN China

PRICE $579 street ($499 without electronics)

prsguitars.com



Gibson 50s LG-2

A reissue with vintage vibe and modern playability

BY NICK MILLEVOI



It's a well-worn cliché that every vintage instrument has some stories to tell. Analyzing every scratch, scrape, and dent and wondering where a particular instrument has been and who has played it can make any guitarist's imagination run wild. Like many others, I frequently wish I could go back in time and see what a guitar played like when it was brand-new, and compare what thousands of hours of playing have done for the sound and playability of the instrument.

Gibson's LG series has been a specific part of my own daydreaming for years. I've always been drawn to these modest guitars but have never bought one, because I swear that each example I play is better than the last. The new 50s LG-2 is no exception. As soon as I picked it up, this guitar felt instantly familiar, and it was easy to imagine that I was holding a new old stock guitar, straight from the 1950s. After years of trying out heavily played vintage models, I feel like I know well just how this guitar will age after years of playing.

A GUITAR MEANT FOR FUN

The Gibson LG series was introduced in 1942 and was comprised of three models—the LG-1, LG-2, and LG-3, with an LG-0 model coming much later. All featuring a similar minimal

design, these small-bodied flattops were intended to appeal to a more budget-minded market—"students, teachers, strolling players, and anyone who wants to have fun with the guitar," according to the 1960 Gibson catalog—with the ladder-braced LG-1 at the lower end of the line, and the higher-end LG-2 and LG-3 featuring X-bracing. The series stuck around for a while, with the LG-0 and LG-1 lasting into the 1970s, while the LG-2 and LG-3 were replaced with the B-25 and B-25N in the late '60s.

Over the years, plenty of players and collectors alike have fallen in love with these guitars. Once available more readily at affordable vintage prices, the market has gone up, and Gibson's reissue of the LG-2—as well as a series of reissues that also features a '50s J-50—is clearly a response. Back in 1960, an LG-2 was a modestly priced instrument at $105 (about $920 today). With a street price of $2,499, the new 50s LG-2 is functioning as a higher-end guitar than the originals were intended to be, targeting the vintage market with a competitive and more affordably priced reissue.

SMALL BODY, BIG TONE

The 50s LG-2 has all the simplicity of the original and the same basic specs, with a mahogany back and sides and a sunburst Sitka spruce top, all solid tonewoods. Thanks to its compact body size—just under 14-1/2 inches across the lower bout, 19 inches long, and around 4-1/2 inches deep at the tailblock—the LG-2 is voiced with a strong midrange response. Notes really pop with lots of attack, but the X-bracing helps deliver a warm low end that rounds out the tone without sounding particularly mellow.

While the tone is excellent, perhaps the biggest appeal of the LG-2 is its playability. It's a really fun guitar that is hard to put down. Its mahogany neck features a comfortable V profile and its rosewood fretboard has a 24.75-inch scale length and 12-inch radius. It feels almost effortless to maneuver around the guitar's 20 frets, 14 to the body.

Everything I play seems to work on the guitar, and I'm constantly finding easy rewards at both ends of the fretboard.

From easy fretting to a well-voiced tone and resonant body, it doesn't take much to make the 50s LG-2 sing. Everything I play seems to work on the guitar, and I'm constantly finding easy rewards at both ends of the fretboard. It's a loud guitar with a lot of clarity. Chords sound full and balanced, while single-note lines sound focused, making it a great all-around choice for just about any style of playing, from fingerstyle to bluegrass to jazz to rock.

Once I get in the zone on this reissue, there is little to remind me that I'm not playing a vintage model. The sound and response are so similar, and I imagine that with more breaking in—and a few scuffs and scrapes—it might be hard to tell that this guitar is a reissue.

THE TAKEAWAY

My enthusiasm for the LG series makes the 50s LG-2 easy to love, and Gibson did a great job re-creating the feel and sound of the original. My one complaint is that Gibson chose to include an L.R. Baggs VTC undersaddle pickup as a standard feature. I'd rather the electronics be optional, as I don't think they really capture the quality of sound the guitar is capable of and I'd appreciate the opportunity to choose my own pickup instead.

That aside, there are certainly plenty of people who love the LG series but would prefer to avoid the possible pitfalls of buying a 60- to 70-year-old acoustic. It's certainly not cheap, but the attention to detail on the 50s LG-2 definitely makes a case for the expense, while the tone and playability make the guitar an essential addition to Gibson's acoustic catalog. AG

SPECS

BODY LG-2 body shape; Sitka spruce top with hand-scalloped X-bracing; mahogany back and sides; multi-ply top binding, single-ply back binding; Vintage Sunburst or Antique Natural nitrocellulose lacquer finish

NECK Mahogany neck with Historic V profile; 24.75" scale length; rosewood fingerboard with mother-of-pearl dots; 12" radius; 1.72"-wide bone nut

OTHER Nickel-plated tuners with plastic cream buttons; rectangular rosewood bridge with bone saddle; teardrop pickguard; Tusq bridge pins; L.R. Baggs VTC pickup with volume and tone controls; hardshell case; available left-handed

MADE IN USA

PRICE $2,499 street

gibson.com



Gold Tone F-6 Mando-Guitar

Unique six-string instrument makes it easy for a guitarist to sound like a mandolinist

BY NICK ROSSI

Gold Tone Musical Instruments, headquartered in Titusville, Florida, has reintroduced the F-6 Mando-Guitar. The 21-fret, short-scale acoustic instrument utilizes standard guitar tuning but is pitched up a full octave, which produces the timbre and character of a mandolin. Boasting a new, wider slim-line neck and a longer scale than its predecessor, the new F-6 promises a little more room to move, as well as a comfortable playing experience, all at an affordable price.

The distant ancestor of the mando-guitar is an 18th-century Italian instrument from the lute family known as the *mandolino alla Genovese* or Genoese mandolin. This very small bowl-backed instrument featured double courses of strings like a contemporary mandolin, but had six sets of double courses (12 strings) and was tuned as a standard guitar is today. Although regionally popular in Italy through the 19th century, the instrument eventually fell into obscurity.

Surprisingly, when the early 20th century mandolin craze swept across the United States, this particular mandolin variant was not revived. However, in 1965, instrument manufacturer Vox introduced the first true mando-guitar, an electric instrument more closely related to a 12-string guitar, designed to capitalize on the emerging folk-rock trend. Gimmickry aside, it found favor among studio musicians even if debate continues to this day about which famous pop records feature its distinctive jangle.

Gold Tone's F-6 is a reimagination of the older mando-guitar. With a mandola-sized body inspired by Lloyd Loar's famous American flat-back with f-hole design, the F-6 offers the player an alternate history that shares the aesthetics and sonic characteristics of the mandolin family of instruments that were produced in Kalamazoo during the early 1920s.



RICH, BALANCED, AND LIVELY

The F-6 is made in China to Gold Tone's specifications and is set up in its Florida facility before shipping. It features a solid spruce top with

maple back and sides, all with a satin finish. Website specs mention both ebony and walnut bridges, but the latter appears to come standard. Finished off with a chrome-plated trapeze bridge, the mando-guitar easily accommodates standard, albeit very light, guitar strings (.008–.042). A raised fretboard allows for two-way truss rod adjustment.

Out of the box, the F-6 was remarkably ready for music making. Well-intonated and with a comfortable setup, all I had to do was bring the strings to pitch and start playing. The instrument's craftsmanship is certainly more than competent and the build feels solid, even if some of the finishing touches, such as the binding, lean towards rough-hewn. But considering Gold Tone's stated goal of offering the highest quality at the fairest price possible, the $580 (street) instrument is definitely a good value.

The reviewed example took little time to open up, and I was able to coax a very pleasant woody sound out of it with relative ease. A quick inspection revealed parallel bracing under the spruce soundboard, which perhaps explained its impressive volume. The manufacturer also touts the benefits of the body's larger air chamber to aid in low-end response. But most impressive was the general timbre of the instrument: rich, balanced, and lively.

INTRIGUING AND FUN

Coming from a standard guitar, the F-6 presented some initial challenges in terms of getting accustomed to its compact dimensions. The bone nut isn't quite as wide as is specified on the website—at least not on the review model—and with a scale length of just 15 inches, every bit of real estate counts. But it ultimately required little transition time to adjust my chops to the mando-guitar.

It's intriguing, if not fun, how the sound and feel of a different-sized and pitched instrument can have a direct impact on one's approach. I was immediately enticed into playing Romantic, tremolo-laden lines with a Mediterranean flair. My fingers started searching out those bluegrass lines buried somewhere back there. Both full-size folk chords and three-to-four-note jazz voicings seem to be at home on this diminutive box, hinting at its versatility. And of course, pop material works quite well on the mando-guitar, echoing the novelty of ukulele but offering up more familiar musical terrain.

The instrument amplified moderately well through an AER Compact 60 amp, the piezo preserving most of the acoustic sound of the instrument at lower volumes. However, the satisfaction decreased as the volume increased, which suggests potential challenges using the instrument in a live setting without modifications. I could not resist also plugging the F-6 into a 1936 Gibson EH-150 tube amp and reeling off a few licks à la Tiny Moore, who played electric mandolin with Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys in the 1940s. Tonally, the experiment wasn't altogether satisfying, although Gold Tone does offer a solidbody electric version of this instrument for non-acoustic string players.

After I spent some time getting to know the F-6, questions inevitably arose: Where might this instrument fit into a string player's stable and to whom would it most appeal? The mando-guitar replaces neither the mandolin nor the guitar but will likely appeal more to those familiar with the latter. To a professional guitarist and very amateur mandolinist such as this reviewer, the hybrid affords the luxury of dispensing with the need for a working knowledge of another tuning and technique. That said, a little mandolin technique goes a long way here, particularly if one is looking to use it as a substitute or alternative for that smaller instrument, either in a recording setting or jam session. Pitched in between its two parent instruments, the F-6 has a range intriguingly close to that of a tenor banjo. It sits nicely on top of a guitar while still allowing plenty of headroom for a fiddle or proper mandolin.

THE BOTTOM LINE

While the Gold Tone F-6 Mando-Guitar might not spark a nationwide revival of mandolin orchestras, it will inspire some players to start exploring the world of smaller plectrum string instruments. Guitarists who have fostered such interest will find the transition both technically easy and musically rewarding. Available at an affordable price point, Gold Tone's retooling of the mando-guitar may also appeal to studio players looking for different textures regardless of the style of music they are creating. AG

SPECS

BODY Solid spruce top; maple back and sides; walnut bridge; satin finish

NECK Maple neck; 15" scale length; 1-3/4" bone nut; select wood fretboard; open-gear Gotoh style tuners; satin finish

OTHER Chrome hardware; adjustable truss rod; piezo pickup; hard case included; available in a 12-string model; right-handed only

MADE IN China

PRICE $579.99 street

goldtonemusicgroup.com











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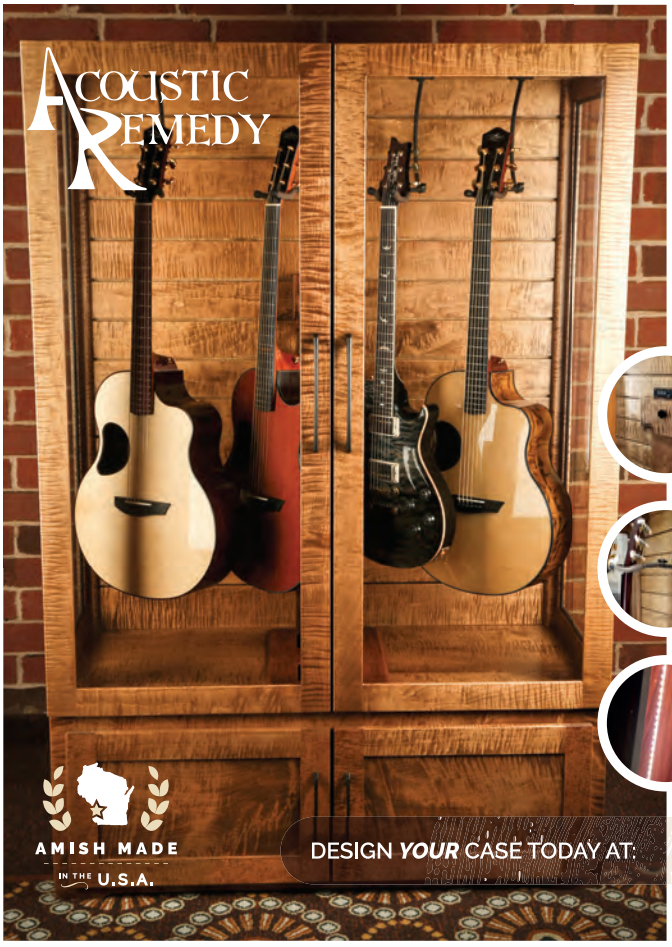
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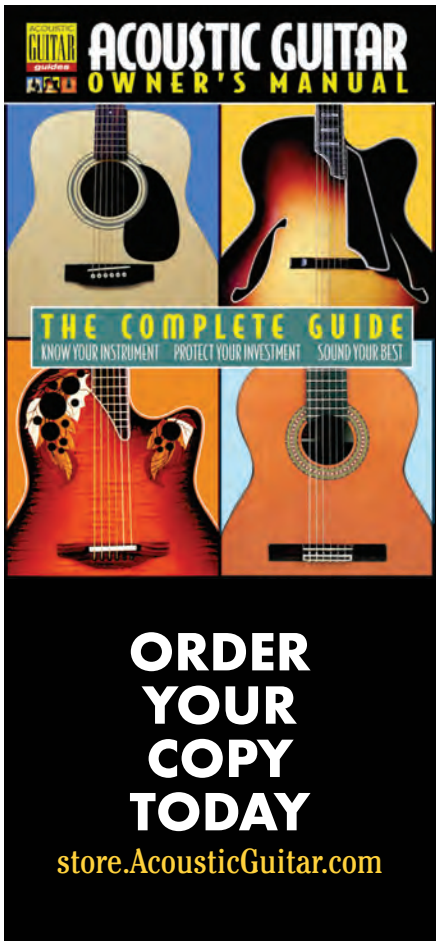
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3 SIZES

2-12 INSTRUMENTS

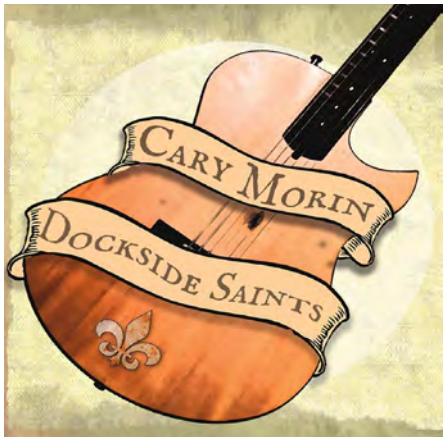
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MIXED MEDIA



Cary Morin

Dockside Saints

(Cary Morin Music)

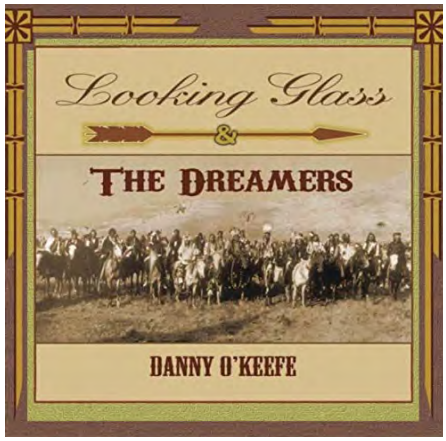
Zydeco, jazz, rock, and other Louisiana flavors

Built upon the tight interplay among a core of Louisiana musicians, and recorded at Dockside Studios in the heart of Cajun country, Cary Morin's *Dockside Saints* packs plenty of zydeco swing. It's in the whirligig accordion-driven bayou stomp "Jamie Rae," and in the Creole skirl of fiddle on the plaintive instrumental "Bare Trees." But Morin also draws on acoustic jazz, Piedmont blues, country, and ramshackle rock 'n' roll to weave a spell worthy of Mary Oneida Toups, the Witch Queen of New Orleans.

Throughout, producer Tony Daigle brings a warm, familial glow to tightly knit yet fluid grooves that only *seem* loose. The easy front porch vibe here is a carefully crafted construct.

On "Prisoner," Morin's slinky slipknot acoustic weaves through funky crisscrossing guitars and rolling organ that swells to a tidal wave. Morin's rough-hewn tenor floats atop a curtain of strummed acoustics on "Exception to the Rule," before the tune is dragged over crags and valleys by coruscating electric guitars.

On "Valley of the Chiefs," Morin, a member of the Crow tribe, pays tribute to his Native American heritage. Over sighing fiddle and coiling, sharp acoustics, he tells how his grandmother escaped after being kidnapped by a neighboring tribe. Swaggering percussion drives "Nobody Gotta Know," which rocks like a long-lost outtake from the Rolling Stones' *Exile on Main Street* sessions. It's just one surprise of many in a collection that pulls together so many disparate strands of American roots music that it can only be described as magic. *—Pat Moran*



Danny O'Keefe

Looking Glass & the Dreamers

(Road Canon)

Brilliant concept album on tragic Native American history

Danny O'Keefe didn't intend to write a concept album about the hypocrisy of the American Dream. He had gone to bed one night in 1968 after thinking about the Lewis Carroll book *Through the Looking Glass*. But it wasn't Alice in Wonderland that visited his dreams—it was the Nez Perce war chief Looking Glass. Upon waking, O'Keefe recalls in the liner notes, he was given the words, "Looking Glass in Oregon, one night had a dream, of soldiers slowly riding in a solemn, endless stream."

Fifty-two years later, O'Keefe has brought his own dream to life on an ambitious album that reflects on the broken promises made by the American government to the First Nation people. The 13 songs are lyrically complex, emotionally moving, and beautifully arranged around O'Keefe's chiming fingerstyle acoustic guitar. The songs, many augmented with evocative sound effects that lend a documentary quality, recount the history of the peaceful Nez Perce, from their pastoral life in the Pacific Northwest to the 1877 betrayal by the U.S. Army (which helped spark the bloody Indian Wars), their exodus to Oklahoma, and Nez Perce Chief Joseph's death in 1904. The inspirational words of Chief Joseph inform this work—the tribe's joy and sorrow are told through recitations by Native American singer Milton "Quiltman" Sahme. "In the end, we measure what we found, by what we lost," O'Keefe sings in "The Captain (Three Sheets to the Wind)."

Few songwriters would be as capable of tackling an American story as big as this—or telling the tale so compellingly. *—Greg Cahill*



Various Artists

Hanging Tree Guitars

(Music Maker Relief Foundation)

Book and album offer glimpses of old and new South

When photographer and Music Maker Relief Foundation founder Timothy Duffy met guitarist and luthier Freeman Vines, Vines was crafting a guitar with wood from a hanging tree—a walnut where a Black man was lynched 90 years ago. The encounter led to the publication of *Hanging Tree Guitars*, a book featuring Vines' story and his spiritual philosophy, illustrated with tintypes taken by Duffy.

Now Duffy's foundation, which provides financial and professional support for traditional musicians like Vines across the South, has released a similarly titled companion CD featuring folk, blues, and gospel performances by artists associated with Music Maker. While the sole guitar made by Vines that is featured on the collection is electric, acoustic guitars predominate.

Elder Anderson Johnson's thrashing strum gives the gospel hymn "Glory, Glory" a relentless drive, as primal as the wind and currents that shaped the earth. A droning cyclical riff drives Adolphus Bell's "Black Man's Dream," which pleads with America to embrace its better angels. Not every track is an impassioned plea for justice, but the stain borne by a country forged in the slave trade is never far away. Bishop Dready Manning's "Hard Luck and Trouble" undercuts a jaunty country blues with spiraling, stinging steel guitar. Guitar Gabriel's "Southland Blues" is laced with slashing razor wire leads.

In the collection's companion volume, Vines confesses he makes guitars to replicate an otherworldly sound that shot through his body one fateful night. *Hanging Tree Guitars* suggests we're all still searching for that sacred sound. *—PM*

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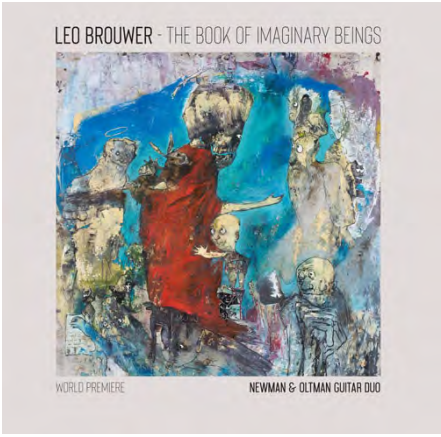
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Newman & Oltman Guitar Duo

The Book of Imaginary Beings

(Musicmastersclassics.com)

A wonderful celebration of Leo Brouwer

Choice selections among Cuban composer Leo Brouwer's two-guitar creations from 1978 to 2018 are the focus of the Newman & Oltman Guitar Duo on *The Book of Imaginary Beings*. The world premiere title track is in four movements and depicts mythological creatures chronicled in a book bearing the same title by Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges. Following a shower of mildly discordant tones, "The Unicorn" adopts a mood of wonderment the sight of a unicorn might evoke. "The Minotaur" lopes with relentless swagger through modal melodies, harmonized lines, and Bartokian string snaps, then culminates with a D power chord. "Fairies and Gnomes" opens evocatively; a folk-like theme devolves into delightfully dissonant chords and scampering melodic passages before a recap of the theme. "The Gorgon and the Manticore" contrasts brooding harmonies, angular tunes, succulent arpeggios, antiphonal chord jabs, and a Stravinsky-like finish.

On "Beatlerianas" (Brouwer's arrangements of The Beatles' "The Fool on the Hill" and "She's Leaving Home"), N&O offer tender readings and phrasing that poignantly underscore the beloved lyrics. "Música Incidental Campesina" comprises four brief pieces penned by Brouwer in 1978. With a nod toward Cuban folk melodies and rhythms and odd meters, these attractive pieces foreshadow elements of Brouwer's later compositions.

Newman & Oltman haven't lost a beat after four decades together. This vinyl audiophile LP is yet another high-water mark for the outstanding New York–based duo. *—Mark Small*



Bobby Rush

Rawer Than Raw

(Thirty Tigers)

Ageless blues giant goes back to his roots

Born into poverty in rural Homer, Louisiana, singer-guitarist-songwriter Bobby Rush started his career in Arkansas, but Mississippi is close to his heart—Rush's mother was a Mississippi native and the state is his adopted home. At 86, the Grammy-winning bluesman has set aside the raucous electric sound for which he is best known to return to his roots. *Rawer Than Raw*, the follow-up to 2007's acoustic-oriented *Raw*, finds Rush paying tribute to five Mississippi Blues Hall of Fame musicians on down-home, solo-acoustic arrangements of five originals (credited to his given name, Emmett Ellis, Jr.), five covers, and the public-domain gem "Honey Bee, Sail On," popularized by Muddy Waters. That track is based on Alan Lomax's historic 1935 Stovall Plantation recordings of Waters.

The album, appropriately enough, kicks off with the Rush original "Down in Mississippi," a laidback shuffle. He then offers a medley of sorts of the Skip James song "Hard Times" and his own "Let Me in Your House," both built around the same simple, repeated blues riff. "Smokestack Lightnin'" is a nod to Howlin' Wolf, who became a close friend after Rush migrated to Chicago. He closes with a spirited version of "Dust My Broom," the Robert Johnson classic later popularized by Elmore James, whom Rush first encountered in the late '40s and considered a mentor. The fifth blues great is harmonica ace Sonny Boy Williamson II, who had a hit with "Don't Start Me Talkin'."

Throughout, Rush's playing is elemental, but authentic, and occasionally augmented by his own gritty harmonica and foot stomps. *—GC*



Pharis and Jason Romero

Bet on Love

(Lula Records)

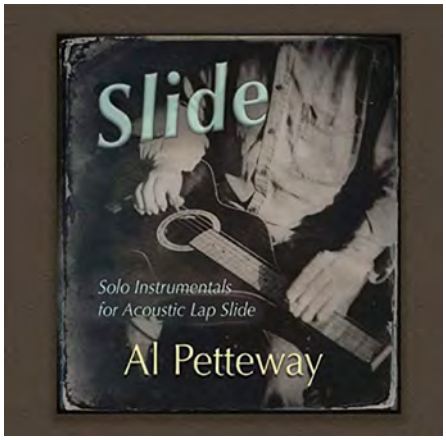
Another intimate set from Canadian folk duo

"Watch lights turn into stars," Pharis Romero sings in "Hometown Blues," the opening song on on the folk duo's latest album, *Bet on Love*. In a phrase, she encapsulates the album: cozy but curious, intimate but open, homespun but imaginative.

In the tiny town of Horsefly, British Columbia, Pharis and Jason Romero build instruments and raise their family in a modest banjo shop. For their fifth full-length album, the couple plays live on the shop floor, occasionally bolstered by guest players on bass and mandolin. Pharis strums her 1939 Gibson J-35 and sings about fresh starts and unseen troubles in "New Day." Jason joins in, weaving waltzing and cyclical textures with precise and spare picking on his 1934 Gibson L-00. On the cautionary but encouraging "Roll on My Friend," Jason switches to plucked and percolating picking on his homemade gourd banjo. His weathered vocal grabs the spotlight before dissolving into warm swarming harmonies with Pharis.

With a catchy sing-along chorus, the title track is propelled by a descending percussive and ringing riff on Jason's Fraulini 12-string. On the pulsing, gently rocking instrumental "New Caledonia," Jason's banjo bubbles as Pharis' whirlpooling picking skips like ripples in a stream.

The cantering "A Bit Old School" is practically rockabilly, riding Jason's bouncing banjo while Pharis sings of finding a fresh path through a familiar forest: "Every place you can call your own," she sings, summing up a worldview that cleaves to tradition while blazing new trails, which also happens to describes this album nicely. *—PM*



Al Petteway

Slide

(Fairewood)

Evocative solo instrumentals in many tunings

Since turning pro at the age of 12, Al Petteway has appeared on more than 60 albums, including 22 under his own name, along with publishing ten books and releasing six instructional DVDs on Appalachian, blues, and Celtic fingerstyle guitar. He's long been a master of DADGAD tuning, and now that his fretting hand is showing signs of age, he's become increasingly interested in acoustic lap slide.

These 11 solo instrumentals, written in six tunings, cover a pandemic-eyed view of the Petteway household. There's "Amy's Garden," played in D A D E A D, which opens the album with a sweet legato for his wife and multi-instrumentalist duet partner, Amy White. "Chloe" and "Scruff Muffin," two D A D F A D tunes about their much-loved rescue dogs, skitter playfully up and down the fretboard, in contrast to the slightly more thoughtful "Kota," a C G D E G D tribute to their cat, and the lithe, lilting "Firefly Waltz," which conjures the pleasures of a North Carolina summer night.

There are weightier moments, too, like "A Certain Sadness," where Petteway climbs up the scale only to fall back down, sliding slowly from E to D to C, and "It's Only the Blues Again," where he adds a few bars of Piedmont syncopation to contrast with another long, gradually descending figure in E. And then there's "Final Journey Home," played in C G C G B♭ D on a Weissenborn-style guitar built by Michael Tracz. It's the album's deepest, most resonant statement—a beautifully satisfying close. *—Kenny Berkowitz*

INTERCONNECTED

"Vickness' uncanny ability to evoke the complex emotions linked to these times and places transcends the specific and catapults his travelogue into the universal." **—Acoustic Guitar Magazine**

"Vickness' acoustic compositions allow him to use his wonderful technique to convey atmospheric, emotional music that immediately draws attention. His stunning harmonics, perfect chord changes, and ability to use the guitar as a percussion instrument are an amazing blend." **—Vintage Guitar Magazine**

The new modern fingerstyle release by **Mark Vickness** featuring two-time Grammy winner, Mads Tolling (violin), Joseph Hebert (cello), Dan Feiszli (bass) and tabla virtuoso, Ty Burhoe





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James Elkington

Ever-Roving Eye

(Paradise of Bachelors)

A disorienting but deeply rewarding outing

Twenty years since leaving London, James Elkington has made himself an essential part of the Chicago indie scene, playing with everyone from Jeff Tweedy to Tortoise without losing his love for Davey Graham and Bert Jansch. Elkington's second solo album, *Ever-Roving Eye*, finds him at his restless, mid-Atlantic best, caught between the gentle harmonics that open "Nowhere Time," the jagged, repeating four-note phrase that follows, and the skittering electric guitar solo that interrupts them both.

That's where Elkington lives, and it's an unsettling place to be. On the instrumental "Rendlesham Way," measures alternate between calmness and dissonance, rising and falling until they reach a slow, meandering middle section that gives way to a strumming, pounding resolution that doesn't resolve anything at all. The songs produce the same uneasiness, with cryptic, contradictory lyrics promising "all that I say is made of smoke/except every word I ever spoke" ("Moon Tempering") and describing death as coming "sooner in my mind/and getting later all the time" ("Late Jim's Lament").

It's a vision that's encapsulated in "Carousel," where a merry-go-round becomes a metaphor of deception and dislocation, of watching the world with an ever-roving eye that doesn't understand what it sees, and where there's a threat hidden inside every compliment. Singing in a smooth, breathy baritone, Elkington should sound reassuring—but of course, it's just another trick, and it's his guitar that tells the real story, pushing forward in a long series of hammer-ons that give no pause in this difficult, disorienting, and deeply rewarding music. *—KB*



Toby Hay

New Music for the 12 String Guitar

(The State51 Conspiracy)

A nature-inspired tapestry of texture and tones

Supple, sinewy, and swift—this could be a description of Toby Hay's playing on his custom Fylde 12-string, or the red kite, the nimble bird of prey that gives the instrument its name. With *New Music for the 12 String Guitar*, British guitarist Hay, based in the red kite's habitat of the Welsh borderlands, weaves a seamless synthesis of instrument, player, and landscape. Hay's collection is a series of sketches; a tapestry of textures and tones wedding to the land and its wildlife. Tracked live with no edits or overdubs, each instrumental draws on British folk, American primitivism, and Hay's unique tunings and non-traditional chords.

On "Morning Song," Hay's ringing ascending strumming resembles the raga-like explorations of 1960s psychedelia. "Merlod Mynydd," a paean to the Welsh mountain pony, suggests the sturdy equine's gait with slashing percussive swipes amid a pulsing drone.

The title of "Sugarloaf Blues" is derived from the setting of the Green Man Festival, where Hay composed the tune. Here, shimmering strumming that suggests mystic Albion entangles with the wiry Appalachian picking of country-rock.

Like its namesake, Hay's Fylde wheels like a predator mid-flight on "The Falconers Knot," a prismatic torrent of urgent cross-picking. With a metallic sitar-like flourish, the forlorn "Last Mountain Hare" unfolds like a threadbare Merlin unveiling a cut-rate illusion.

Hay closes this series of journal entries with his sole cover, a shimmering rendition of "Auld Lang Syne." Through a weave of resonating rhythms, this spinner of complex compositions relies on the elemental power of the bittersweet air. *—PM*



Teja Gerken and Doug Young

Duets

(self-released)

Modern duets showcase guitar collection's expressive range

A few years ago I wandered into small wine bar not far from my home on the coast south of San Francisco, and found two guitarists enveloped by a fleet of instruments that was clearly drawing the interest of both the oenophiles and music fans gathered there. Though at least some of members of the crowd had clearly had more than one or three glasses of wine, everyone sat in rapt attention as the guitarists, Teja Gerken and Doug Young, began to work their fingerstyle magic on their instruments.

Lucky for all of us, Gerken, a former senior editor of this magazine, and Young, a regular contributing writer, have released an album of duets. In the studio, they used an enviable assortment of instruments—Gerken on a Martin Custom OM, Lowden O10, Mario DeSio baritone, Kenny Hill Ruck Model, National Reso-Phonic Style 1 Tricone, and Epiphone Emperor Joe, and Young on a Kent Hamblin Grand Concert, Ed Claxton EM, Martin OMC-28B Laurence Juber, Taylor GS 12-string, Yamamoto Reverie Mini 12-String, and Lowden O35. (You can see a video of this gear on Young's YouTube page.)

The album's 11 tracks include a mixture of originals and folk ("St. Anne's Reel" and "The South Wind") and classical pieces (Francisco Tárrega's "Study in E Minor"), as well as The Beatles' "Here Comes the Sun" and Béla Fleck's "Travis." What's most striking about *Duets* is the guitarists' deep shared knowledge of their instrument and its history; their ear for texture, harmony, and color; and their uncanny ability to maintain distinctive personal styles while sounding together as a cohesive whole. *Duets* represents modern fingerstyle at the highest level and is highly recommended for any guitar aficionado or music lover. *—Adam Perlmutter*

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Signed, David Lusterman, Publisher

ADVERTISER INDEX

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Acoustic Remedy Cases, acousticremedycases.com **75**

Albert Augustine, Ltd., albertaugustine.com **11**

Armadillo Enterprises, lunaguitars.com **83**

Baltimore Classical Guitar Society, bcgs.org **77**

Black Mountain Picks, blackmountainpicks.com **74**

C.F. Martin & Co., Inc., martinguitar.com **84**

Collings Guitars, collingsguitars.com **7**

Cordoba Guitars, cordobamusicgroup.com **4**

Elixir Strings, elixirstrings.com **8**

G7th Ltd., g7th.com **41**

Gibson Montana, gibson.com **2**

Guitar Foundation Of America, guitarfoundation.org **57**

Guitars in the Classroom, guitarsintheclassroom.org **81**

Hill Guitar Company, Inc., hillguitar.com **13**

Honz Technology, LLC, tonewoodamp.com **65**

Jewitt Guitars, jewittguitars.com **74**

Lee Guitars, leeguitars.com **67**

LR Baggs Corp., lrbaggs.com **31**

Mark Vickness, markvickness.com **79**

MusicNomad, musicnomadcare.com **63**

P.K. Thompson Guitars, pkthompsonguitars.com **63**

Paul Reed Smith Guitars, prsguitars.com **3**

Phoenix Guitar Company, phoenixguitarco.com **63**

RainSong Graphite Guitars, rainsong.com **9**

Roberto-Venn School of Luthiery, roberto-venn.com **75**

Roland Corporation, rolandus.com **17**

Shubb Capos, shubb.com **57**

Solid Ground Stands, solidgroundstands.com **74**

Strings by Mail, stringsbymail.com **30, 57, 77**

Sweetwater Sound, sweetwater.com **23**

Tallman Instruments, tallmaninstruments.com **79**

West Dean College, westdean.org.uk **47**

Wilkie Stringed Instruments, wilkiestringedinstruments.com . . **74**

WATCH A MICRO-DOCUMENTARY ON PRESTON THOMPSON'S MASTERPIECE #2
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Preston Thompson Masterpiece #2 Koi Pond

A finely crafted 00 teeming with dazzling inlay art

BY GREG OLWELL

The Masterpiece series from Preston Thompson Guitars is a chance for the shop's artisans to channel inspiration while stretching the boundaries of their skills. The team created its first Masterpiece guitar last year, and this second instrument in the series is dedicated to the shop's founding luthier and namesake, who had a chance to view the designs before he died in 2019.

For Masterpiece #2, the team concentrated on a harmonious concept that flows across the entire instrument, from materials to artwork. The Koi Pond guitar is a 14-fret 00 shape made with lushly quilted Western maple back and sides, an Adirondack spruce top with extreme bear-claw figure, and a 24.9-inch scale mahogany neck. The body and neck are bound with Brazilian rosewood and a thin line of brass purfling that contributes a subtle and warm glow.

Thompson inlay specialist and designer Simon Haycraft says that the spruce was chosen not just for its sound but also to enhance the guitar's design. "The figure is almost like a breeze across the top of the water," says Haycraft, adding, "It has that ripple to it—that movement and life, and it adds to this concept of water and movement."

The back's designs are stained directly into the maple, so that the artwork doesn't impact the wood structure the way an inlay set into the body might. The result is that the stained koi fish and waterlily designs pick up the maple's quilted figure, which helps give them a watery shimmer. Thompson's first full-fretboard inlay design features nearly 200 individual pieces of stone, pearl, and brass that flow toward the headstock's cherry blossom inlays. The West African ebony fingerboard is inlaid with three different shades of green reconstituted stone for a muted but varied look, with pink mussel shell employed for the lilies.

"It's a stunning piece of art," says Thompson luthier Joel Chadd, "but it's absolutely meant to be played. That's why we do this." AG







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